THE INDYPENDENT

BEYOND POLICING — P8 • SMALL-TOWN AMERICA — P16

#282: SEPTEMBER 2023

AlleXion X performs for L train riders.

LAURA JANE BRETT

UNDERGROUND MUSIC

SUBWAY BUSKERS TALK ABOUT THEIR ART, PERFORMING IN PUBLIC AND MAKING ENOUGH $$ TO SURVIVE

BY LYDIA WEI • PAGE 18

THE INDYPENDENT

THE INDYPENDENT, INC.
388 Atlantic Avenue,
2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
917-426-4856
www.indypendent.org
Twitter: @TheIndypendent
Instagram: theindypendent

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold, Alina Mogilyanskaya, Ann Schneider, John Tarleton

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
John Tarleton

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Amba Guerguerian

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ellen Davidson, Alina Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas Powers, Steven Wishnia

ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR
Frank Reynoso

DESIGN DIRECTOR
Mikael "Dolor Whip" Tarkela

INTERNS
Lane Dibler, Lydia Wei

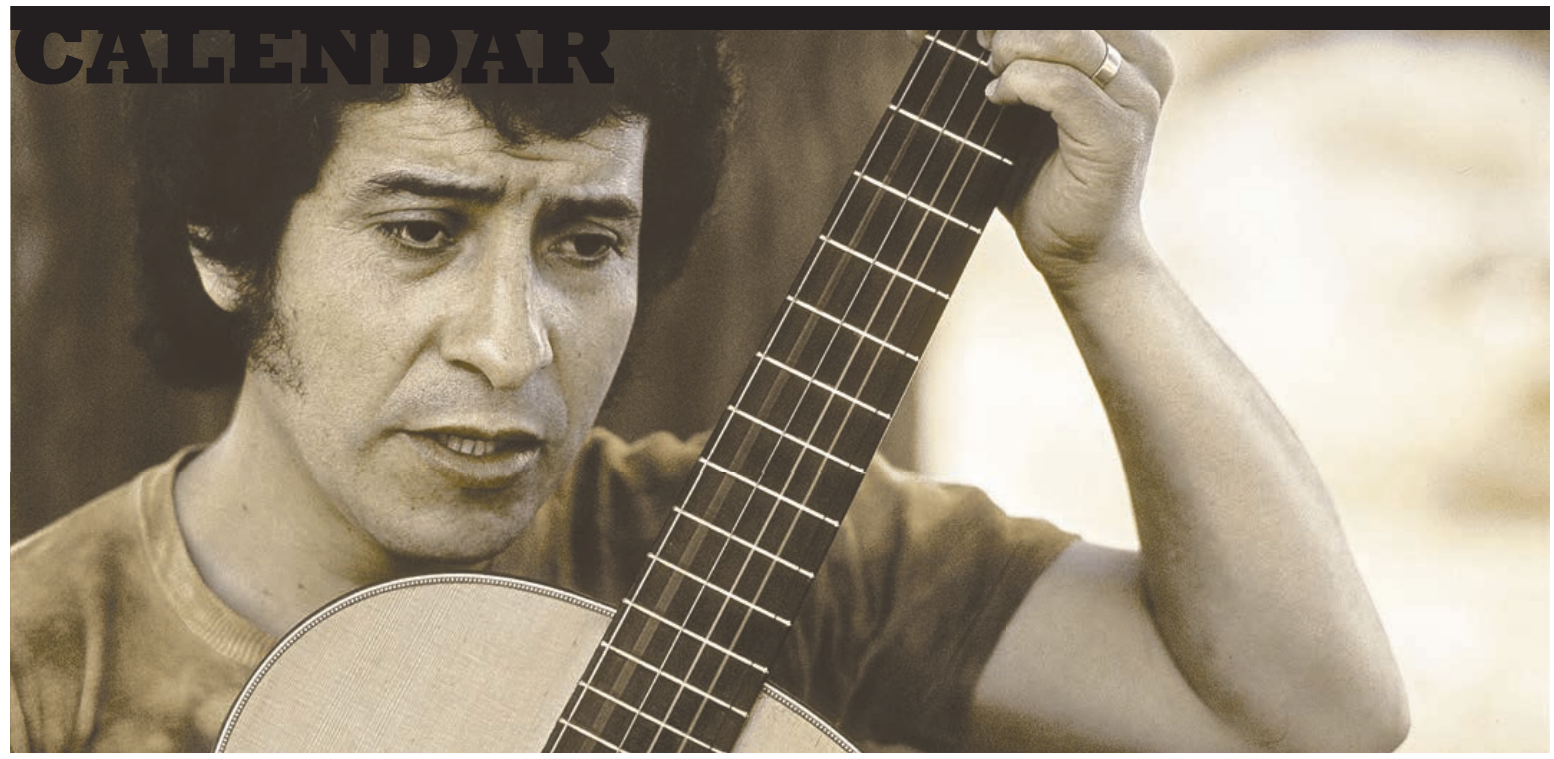
GENERAL INQUIRIES:
contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:
submissions@indypendent.org

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:
ads@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS
Linda Martín Alcoff, Eleanor J. Bader, Bennett Baumer, Nina Berman, Laura Jane Brett, Sue Brisk, Peter Carellini, Lane Dibler, Olga Federova, Renée Feltz, Lynne Foster, Esteban Guerra, Theodore Hamm, Nancy Hoch, David Hollenbach, Manvi Jalan, Josh Joseph, Milo Keough, Christine Larsen, Derek Ludovici, Ben Mankoff, Ash Marinaccio, Gary Martin, Reverend Billy, John Teufel, Tyrone Wallace, and Lara-Nour Walton, Keating Zelenke.

VOLUNTEER DISTRIBUTORS
Erik Anders-Nilssen, Eric Brelsford, Hank Dombrowski, Joseph Esposito, Lew Friedman, Priscilla Grim, Michael Korn, Christine Miller, Saul Nieves, Tom O'Keefe, Caroline Rath, Norm Scott, and Amanda Vender.



PATRICK BURNS

SEP/OCT

FRI SEP 22 • 5:30PM–7PM • DONATIONS SUGGESTED
REBEL IN VENUS: AUTHOR TALK WITH MARISSA ALMA NICK AND YARA TRAVIESO
Looking for queer indie fun? Marissa Alma Nick will present a live reading of her book Rebel In Venus - a story of intimate friendship, trauma and the power of first love. RSVP at bluestockings.com. Masks are required to enter the bookstore.
BLUESTOCKINGS
116 Suffolk St, Manhattan

FRI SEP 22 • 7PM–11PM • ADVANCE: $20/DAY OF SHOW: $25
UPTOWN NIGHTS LATIN MUSIC SERIES: PABLO MAYOR'S FOLKLORE URBANO ORCHESTRA
The Harlem Stage welcomes the return of Uptown Nights – a music series promoting diverse genres of music from September through December. Starting with a healthy kick is Pan-Latin pianist Pablo Mayor and his 13- piece Folklore Urbano Orchestra. After the performance, there will be a dance class taught by choreographer, dancer, and Harlem Stage commissioned artist, Daniel Fetecua. Wrapping up the night will be a salsa DJ dance party with music spun by DJ Franklin Ayala and co-hosted with Talia Castro-Pozo.
HARLEM STAGE
150 Convent Ave, Manhattan

WED SEP 27 • 6:30PM • FREE
BETWEEN THE LINES PRESENTS BAYARD RUSTIN, A LEGACY OF PROTEST AND POLITICS
Micahel G. Long, editor of the new collection of essays, Bayard Rustin, A Legacy of Protest and Politics, will join Jafari S. Allen, professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Columbia University, in conversation about the life and legacy of Bayard Rustin, the civil rights leader behind the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, as well as an openly gay man.
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd, Manhattan

FRI SEP 29–SAT SEP 30 • 10:30AM–6PM • FREE
HEIVA PASIFIKA NYC 2023
Celebrate with NYC's first large-scale Pacific Island Festival. This highly anticipated event includes will include art exhibitions, various cultural workshops and master classes and an Ori Tahiti Competition, showcasing some of the best dancers from around the world.
heivapasifikananyc.com
LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
40 Lincoln Center Plz, Manhattan

SAT SEP 30 • 7PM • FREE
BRONX RISING: THE 50 YEAR LEGACY OF VICTOR JARA
Join in the celebration of the life and legacy of Chilean musician, activist and comrade Victor Jara. Jara played a pivotal role in establishing the musical movement, Nueva canción chilena. This genre incorporated strong political and social themes of the time and took from traditional Chilean folk music sound. Music will by Fernadito and Natalia Bernal & En Diablada as well as a historical presentation by Rodstarz of Rebel Diaz.
BRONX MUSIC HERITAGE CENTER
1303 Louis Nine Blvd, Bronx

SAT OCT 7–MON OCT 9 • FREE
9TH ANNUAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY NYC
Indigenous leaders, elders, medicine people, cultural performers and supporters from across North America will gather at Randalls Island Park to share traditions through song, dance, art, and prayer. Gates will open at 10AM on SAT 7th. Free admission and parking are offered, though donations are greatly appreciated. To volunteer, register on the @ipdnyc instagram page.
20 Randalls Island Park, Manhattan

TUE OCT 10 • 7PM • $20–$47
BOOK LAUNCH: ROXANE GAY, OPINIONS
Roxane Gay, the best selling author of "Bad Feminist" will read from Opinions, her new book of essays. Gay will be joined by Michelle Buteau, author of Survival of the Thickest.
symphonyspace.org.
PETER JAY SHARP THEATRE
155 W 65th St, Manhattan

OCT 12–19 • $10–$20
BROOKLYN HORROR FILM FESTIVAL 2023
Do you have a disposition towards fake blood and monsters? Join in the seasonal festivities of scaring the spirit out of you with Brooklyn Horror Film Festival. Passes may be purchased for access to all events, as well as individual tickets may be purchased ranging in prices $10–$20.
This festival screens at Nitehawk Cinema Williamsburg (136 Metropolitan Ave.) and Nitehawk Cinema Prospect Park (188 Prospect Park West).

OCT 14 • 7PM–9:30PM • FREE
MATERIAL LIBERATION: A PEOPLE'S FASHION SHOW VOL 3
Join the People's Forum community as they present their response to NY Fashion Week and Met Gala - events that aim to separate the have from the have-nots. Material Liberation provides a unifying space for designers and admirers to partake in the liberating properties of fashion overlooked by corporate media. Organizers ask all attendees to bring clothing in good condition to donate to Free Store Astoria.
VIOLETA PARRA STAGE
320 West 37th St, Manhattan

LEGACY: *The life and times of legendary Civil Rights Movement organizer Bayard Rustin will be discussed at the Schomburg Center on Sept. 27.*

OCT 1–31 • MON–FRI: 12PM–4:30PM, SAT & SUN: 10AM–4:30PM • FREE|
PUMPKIN PATCH @THE QUEENS COUNTY FARM MUSEUM
What better time to visit the farm than during harvest season. Throughout October the 47-acre farm provides fun family activities such as hayrides, a maize maze, apple cider booth, and farm scavenger hunt.
THE QUEENS COUNTY FARM MUSEUM
7350 Little Neck Pkwy, Queens

SAT OCT 21 • 12PM
DONATION BASED
THE WORLD OF WITCHES/ MUNDO DE BRUJXS VENDORS' MARKET
Celebrate the cycle of life and abundant gifts of nature this harvest season. The market will feature vendors from numerous traditions around the world selling artwork, talismans, herbs, potions, and more. Throughout the day skill-sharing workshops will be offered where attendees can learn how to make tools of magic, healing, and growth. The first hour of the market will be reduced capacity to allow a comfortable option for the immunocompromised goers.
MAYDAY SPACE
176 St Nicholas Ave, Brooklyn

ADVERTISE IN THE INDY
• GREAT RATES
• UNIQUE AUDIENCE
• PERSONAL ATTENTION FROM US
• HIGH-QUALITY DESIGN AT NO EXTRA CHARGE
917-426-4856 • ADS@INDYPENDENT.ORG

IN THIS ISSUE

THE REAL RUDY, P4
Former NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani was an authoritarian thug long before he teamed up with Donald Trump.

NYC BRIEFS, P5
Nazis praise Mayor Adams, shady fundraisers indicted, police unions stall protest settlement, Assembly races heat up.

MILLER TIME, P6
The case against Carl Miller has collapsed since he was convicted of an infamous 1979 murder. But winning exoneration remains elusive.

BEYOND POLICING, P8
These unarmed crime fighters stop violent crime before it starts.

COP CITY UPDATE, P9
RICO indictments, ballot referendum up in the air and more.

ON THE PICKET LINE, P10
A SAG-AFTRA member reflects on what their first strike has taught them.

LABOR BRIEFS, P10
A big NLRB victory, Captive audience meetings banned in NY, New School union wave grows, REI workers flex.

NEW YORK-CHILE SOLIDARITY, P11
In a four-page special section, we look at how New Yorkers responded to the 1973 coup in Chile.

TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY?, P15
Student loan debtors face hard choices as pandemic-era moratorium on student loan payments ends Oct. 1.

THE OTHER AMERICA, P16
What makes people stay in economically-abandoned small towns like Iron River, Michigan?

CLEANSED BY MUD, P17
Bad weather at the Burning Man festival brought 73,000 attendees to the brink of disaster.

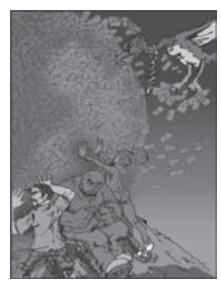
A BUSKER'S LIFE, P18
Subway performers talk about their art and making a living one tip at a time.

DAVID GRAEBER & STUDENT LOANS, P20
The anarchist anthropologist wrote a best-selling book about debt and then started organizing to end it.

CARE INC, P21
The exploitation of low-wage caregivers is both pervasive and barely acknowledged.

HELEN KELLER'S FORGOTTEN RADICALISM, P22
There's more to Helen Keller than her inspiring story of overcoming serious physical disabilities.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS, P23
Don't denounce climate-change protesters for being disruptive, the rev says, join them!



Amy Goodman

Juan González

Nermeen Shaikh

Independent Global News

Tune in to Democracy Now!'s daily news hour for the latest in-depth interviews, analysis, historical perspectives and substantive debates on the most pressing issues of the day.

Visit

DEMOCRACYNOW.ORG

DEMOCRACY NOW!

Daily Public TV / Radio / Internet News Hour

Subscribe to the Daily News Digest

Follow us @ democracynow

BROADCAST ON MORE THAN 1,500 PUBLIC TV AND RADIO STATIONS WORLDWIDE

An Environmental Festival
Saturday, September 23, 2023 | 1-5 p.m.

Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York
160 Central Park West, New York, NY 10023

Unitarian Universalists believe in learning from multiple spiritual teachers, honoring nature, and protecting democracy. As NYC wraps up Climate Week, join Unitarian Universalists of all ages to celebrate, lament what's still left to be done, and imagine what is possible to create.

Environmental Festival: 1-4 p.m.
Storytelling, Music, Arts & Crafts, Meditation, & Childcare!

Jazz Vespers Service: 4-5 p.m.
Songs, Ritual & Reflections for Environmental Justice

From Jersey City to Long Island, join the New York State Convention of Universalists, Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, New York Unitarian Universalist Justice, Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York, and many more partners in the struggle for compassion and climate justice. Let's imagine and create!

ANGELA BOCAGE

RUDY GIULIANI WAS ALWAYS THIS ROTTEN

FORMER NYC MAYOR'S BAD BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN IN PLAIN VIEW FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS

By Steven Wishnia

Your tits belong to me.
These are mine, you got it?
Understand? I'm very fucking possessive. I've gone easy on you.

That, according to Noelle Dunphy, is what Rudolph Giuliani, the former New York City mayor turned Donald Trump henchman, told her.

She is now suing him for $10 million, claiming that when he hired her as an assistant in 2019, promising her $1 million a year, he made it clear that sex with him was one of her job duties — and two years later, fired her after paying her only $12,000.

Repulsive? Yes. But it confirms what many New Yorkers have long suspected: There was no way someone who was that much of a bully in public wasn't an abusive control freak in private.

Yes, Giuliani's story has been cast as tragedy, the fall from "America's Mayor" and the heroic crime-buster who tamed "Fear City" to the buffoon who stood in a strip-mall parking lot in Philadelphia raving that Democrats had cheated Donald Trump out of victory in 2020 with dead people's ballots. He's now out on bail, facing 13 felony charges in Georgia that he conspired to nullify Joseph Biden's election with lies, intimidation and shyster chicanery.

The legend of Giuliani as an icon of urban renaissance and post-9/11 resilience is largely based on myth. He's been an authoritarian, racist bully for decades.

In September 1992, 29 years before the MAGA mob invaded the Capitol to try to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College's vote for Biden, several thousand off-duty police officers, enraged by Mayor David Dinkins' plan to have an independent civilian board review complaints of police misconduct, tried to storm City Hall. The cops blocked traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge, rocking cars and jumping on them.

They were virtually all white, and many were drinking. Some carried caricatures depicting Dinkins, the city's first Black mayor, engaged in various sex acts. One blocked Brooklyn City Councilmember Una Clarke from crossing the street to City Hall, calling her a "[racial slur] who says she's a councilmember."

Giuliani, speaking through a bullhorn on top of a car near City Hall, riled up the crowd, slamming Dinkins' policies and leading a chant of "Bullshit! Bullshit!"

A Black transit cop named Eric Adams told reporters that it was "a drunk, racist lynch mob."

The cornerstone of the Giuliani legend is that his policy of arresting thousands of people for minor offenses is what caused the dramatic drop in crime in New York in the 1990s. In reality, it probably had more to do with Police Commissioner William Bratton using computers to pinpoint crime hotspots and Mayor Dinkins lining up funding to hire 6,000 more cops — who didn't hit the street until after Giuliani took office in '94.

Giuliani's method was to arrest 19 people guilty of nothing more than drinking beer or bicycle-riding violations in order to nab one with an outstanding felony warrant. His myth is that only he had the guts to do what had to be done against the "element" — a racial euphemism of the era inevitably prefaced by "I'm not prejudiced, but…"

By his second term, he had made pot-smoking a top police priority. In 2000, 70,000 people, 85% of them black or Latino, were arrested for marijuana possession in public. These charges were usually too petty for jail sentences, but people busted often had to spend 24 to 48 hours in a holding tank. (As a Justice Department official in Ronald Reagan's administration, Giuliani had made marijuana a bigger priority than heroin, with paramilitary raids on farmers in California.)

The Giuliani administration also pioneered many of the draconian police tactics used against protests in the 21st century: preemptive mass arrests, penning, paramilitary evictions of squats and helicopters hovering over peaceful protests. In 1998, he had subway service to central Harlem shut off on the afternoon of a relatively small rally by a Black supremacist offshoot of the Nation of Islam.

In December 1999, he tried to have homeless children taken away from their parents on the grounds that simply being homeless was evidence of neglect — which inspired the Rev. Al Sharpton to declare at a Union Square rally, "If Giuliani had been the mayor of Bethlehem, he would have said Joseph and Mary were unfit parents and put the baby Jesus into foster care."

And, beginning in the late '90s, he enforced a Prohibition-era cabaret law that banned dancing in bars without a special license, giving them $1,500 fines if three or more people were dancing to the jukebox.

"Freedom is about authority," he once declared.

New Yorkers had soured on that by early 1999, after the police killing of Amadou Diallo. Giuliani's support had always been racially polarized. His races against Dinkins in 1989 and 1993 were both close citywide, but he got less than one-sixth of the vote in heavily Black districts, generally less than one-third in Latino ones and more than five-sixths in overwhelmingly white areas.

White voters carried him to reelection in 1997. But the killing of Diallo, an unarmed Guinean peddler shot 41 times while reaching for his wallet after cops shouted for him to show ID, catalyzed attitudes that Giuliani had gone too far. The killing of Patrick Dorismond in 2000, shot after he angrily told an aggressive undercover cop that he didn't sell weed, punctured Giuliani's political future — along with him announcing that he was seeking a divorce on TV before he'd informed his wife.

Giuliani cashed in on his post-9/11 celebrity, but was unable to parlay it into a Cabinet post, and his 2008 presidential campaign flamed out. The anti-marijuana crusader regularly overserved himself Scotch.

He has now cast himself as a heterosexual Roy Cohn, a mob-lawyer mouthpiece and consigliere for an iconic conman and wannabe dictator. Yes, his brand was "tough on crime," but which side was he on when he egged on rogue white cops assailing City Hall and schemed to have fake electors reinstall Trump?

GIULIANI ONCE DECLARED "FREEDOM IS ABOUT AUTHORITY."

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

NY ATTORNEY GENERAL:
Letitia James is trying to rein in abusive policing at protests.

ADAMS ORDERS MORE BUDGET CUTS

Mayor Eric Adams has instructed City agencies to cut their budgets 15% by next April, citing the City's estimated $10 billion budget deficit and the cost of housing more than 100,000 immigrants seeking asylum. The mayor told city commissioners and budget officials Sep. 9 that they needed to reduce spending in three 5% decrements beginning in November. He acknowledged that the cuts "will hurt," but said they will not include layoffs — though they will freeze hiring, *Gothamist* reported. He added that they could be averted with more federal and state aid. "This is the fifth time our mayor has made the choice to hamstring city government and gut vital services," City Councilmember Alexa Aviles (D-Sunset Park) responded. The announcement came three days after Adams told a town-hall meeting on the Upper West Side that the immigrant influx "will destroy New York City." That won him praise from congressional Republicans — and from a notorious neo-Nazi blog, which called his remarks "based" and "insightful."

POLICE UNION STALLS PROTEST SETTLEMENT

A legal settlement that would prohibit city police from "kettling" protesters has been delayed by last-minute objections from the Police Benevolent Association. Federal District Judge Colleen McMahon on Sep. 8 withdrew her approval of the deal, reached three days earlier to resolve several lawsuits related to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. It would establish a four-tier protocol for policing protests, with police not allowed to disperse crowds until the fourth tier, situations such as protesters trying to block entry into a hospital or "widespread criminal conduct that cannot be addressed by targeted arrests." It would prevent "the sort of indiscriminate violence and retaliatory over-policing New York saw in the summer of 2020," Legal Aid Society lawyer Corey Stoughton said in a statement released by state Attorney General Letitia James' office. The PBA said the proposed rules would make it more difficult to respond to protests quickly. Judge McMahon's order will delay final approval of the settlement for at least 60 days in order to consider the union's objections. The PBA's lawyer is her former law partner.

FOUR ADAMS FUNDRAISERS INDICTED

Four hosts of an August 2021 fundraiser for Mayor Eric Adams in Queens were indicted Sep. 13 on bribery and other charges in State Supreme Court in Manhattan. Former City Buildings Commissioner Eric Ulrich, two alleged Gambino crime-family associates Michael Mazzio and Anthony Livreri, and former Ulrich aide Joseph Livreri all pleaded not guilty. According to Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office, the favors purchased included getting Mazzio's daughter a job at the Department of Corrections and expediting a reinspection at the Livreri brothers' pizzeria after it was closed "due to multiple health violations." Joseph Livreri co-owns an illegal gambling club in Ozone Park, it said. Ulrich, a Republican member of the City Council from 2009 to 2021, joined Adams' administration as an adviser in January 2022 before being named to head the Buildings Department, but resigned last November after learning he was under investigation.

2024 DOWN BALLOT RACES HEAT UP

Democrats control supermajorities in both houses of the New York legislature. However, in recent years the state Assembly has emerged as the place where progressive legislation — higher taxes on the rich, good-cause eviction and more — goes to die. Progressives and socialists in turn are gearing up to challenge conservative Democratic incumbents in next year's primary. In Assembly District 70 in Harlem, Maria Ordoñez, a former Bernie Sanders delegate who finished second in a crowded 2021 City Council race, is running to unseat Assembly Member Inez Dickens, a millionaire landlord who has been a vocal opponent of expanding tenant protections. In Assembly District 37, labor organizer Claire Valdez is challenging incumbent Juan Ardilla, whose progressive support cratered last year after he was accused of sexual harassment by two women. As *The Indy* goes to press, Valdez is on track to win the endorsement of the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, which already holds several elected offices in its Western Queens stronghold.

Tell Congress: Support the Philippine Human Rights Act!

STOP THE KILLINGS
RESIST DUTERTE'S FASCIST DICTATORSHIP!
DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY IN THE PHILIPPINES!
MALAYA MOVEMENT

Since 2016 the US has supported the regressive administrations of President Rodrigo Duterte and current President BongBong Marcos, whose continuing drug war policies and other repressive campaigns have claimed over 30,000 lives from the urban poor, farmers, peasants, indigenous, environmental activists, and government critics.

This legislation aims to suspend millions of dollars of U.S. security assistance to the Philippines until the Philippine government has made certain reforms to the military and police forces in order to protect human rights.

Learn more & take action: humanrightsph.org

Brooklyn For Peace
388 Atlantic Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11217

LAURA JANE BRETT

IDA LIBBY DENGROVE

WAITING FOR EXONERATION

42 YEARS AFTER HE WAS CONVICTED OF AN INFAMOUS CROWN HEIGHTS MURDER, CARL MILLER FACES A LEGAL SYSTEM MIRED IN INERTIA

By Theodore Hamm

"Rabbi Slain in Crown Heights," read the *New York Post*'s cover on the final Friday of October 1979. Rabbi David Okunov, a Soviet exile who became a leader in Brooklyn's Hasidic community, thus joined President Jimmy Carter, Senator Ted Kennedy, Yankees' fiery manager Billy Martin and the Shah of Iran on the tabloid's front page. The *Post* reported that an eyewitness saw a "young black man" leaving the murder scene with the rabbi's prayer shawl.

Governor Hugh Carey stated that he was "horrified" by the senseless slaying and hoped "that the memory of [Rabbi Okunov's] struggle for freedom and justice and mercy will be cherished by every New Yorker." Senator Kennedy, then building support for his primary challenge against Carter, offered condolences. "We blame Mayor Koch and the politicians for this, not the blacks," said Rabbi Elye Gross, executive director of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, citing the city's lack of investment in the blighted neighborhood.

In September of the following year, a Brooklyn jury deemed Carl Miller guilty of killing Okunov. A Black resident of Crown Heights who turned 19 on the day of the murder, Miller would spend the next 30 years in upstate prisons. From the fall of 1979 through the present, he has maintained his innocence. The witness who saw someone running with the rabbi's shawl did not identify Miller in a lineup, nor did he testify at the trial. That same person, Chanina Sperlin, is now one of the most powerful Hasidic figures in the city, who joined Mayor Eric Adams on stage for his 2021 victory party.

Since 2014, the Brooklyn DA's Conviction Review Unit has exonerated nearly three dozen people in murder cases, one of which dated back to the early 1960s. But earlier this year the CRU closed its investigation of Miller's case without interviewing the key figures involved, including the only witness who identified Miller as well as Sperlin, the lead detective, and a then-Crown Heights precinct cop named Louis Scarcella, whose subsequent handiwork as a Brooklyn homicide detective led to several CRU exonerations.

Soon to be 63, Miller has spent his entire adult life branded as a murderer. Will he ever get a fair shot at clearing his name?

THE MORNING OF THE CRIME

Just before 7 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 25, 1979, Rabbi Okunov was shot to death en route to his Crown Heights synagogue. The murder occurred in front of 808 Montgomery St., near Troy Avenue. The victim's briefcase contained a prayer shawl and prayer book, but no money. Shawl in hand, the fleeing suspect ran past Chanina Sperlin towards 565 Crown St., a large apartment building with vacant units. There police found the belongings of Darryl Brown, then 17. Brown was the only witness who testified that he saw Carl Miller kill Rabbi Okunov.

Crown Heights at the time was home to the Jewish Defense League (JDL), the militant nationalist group founded by Meir Kahane. Miller told a *Daily News* columnist at the time of his trial that JDL members hired him to do various odd jobs and that he was on good terms with them. "Why," Miller recently told *The Indypendent*, "would I be so foolish as to kill a rabbi two blocks from the JDL's headquarters when they all knew who I was?"

Cops initially viewed Darryl Brown as their main suspect, but Brown then told NYPD Detective Thomas Sorrentino that his friend Miller was the culprit. Both Brown and Miller belonged to the Five-Percent Nation, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam that many cops viewed as a gang. In mid-November, Miller agreed to participate in a police lineup without first con-

sulting a lawyer. Arrested previously for various low-level crimes, Miller knew his rights.

Defense attorneys caution against volunteering for a lineup. "It's only advisable if you are innocent and there is no way anyone will pick you out because you were not there," says Ron Kuby, who has won several exonerations from the CRU but is not connected to Miller's case.

The two eyewitnesses who viewed the lineup did not select Miller. Louis Fazio, a retired dressmaker walking his dog on the morning of the murder, saw the shooter up close. Sperlin, meanwhile, got a clear look at the person he said he saw running from the scene, but did not recognize Miller. But Brown's statement to detectives still led to his friend's arrest.

Both Fazio and Sperlin said the suspect was 5'9" and weighed around 150 pounds, a description that matched Brown but not Miller, who was 5'11", 190 pounds and a boxer with broad shoulders. When Fazio arrived in court and told his wife that Miller was larger than the person he saw at the crime scene, prosecutor Barbara Newman (now a retired judge) removed Fazio from her witness list. The retired dressmaker then testified on behalf of Miller.

Rabbi Okunov's family and friends from Crown Heights packed the courtroom. Along with a jury of eleven whites* and one Black, the spectators heard Darryl Brown testify that from a half-block away, he observed Miller shoot Okunov. Despite the fact that sunrise was 7:18 am (20 minutes later than the murder), Brown managed to describe the contents of the victim's briefcase in precise detail. Brown also said that Okunov had not raised his hand in front of his face, whereas the medical examiner testified that gunpowder residue showed that the rabbi had done so.

Upon first speaking to police, Miller said that on the morning of the murder, he had been in Southeast Queens, waiting for his girlfriend's mother (who did not like Carl) to leave for work. That became his alibi defense at trial. When the girlfriend testified, ADA Newman tripped her up with inconsistent statements that she had made to detectives.

Before providing the jury with instructions, Judge Sybil Hart Kooper (now deceased) told Howard Weiswasser, Miller's defense attorney, that his client's alibi defense "has been pretty well discredited."

"I wish I never heard the word alibi," Weiswasser replied. Miller's claim, however, remained consistent.

In October 1980, Judge Kooper sentenced Miller to 25 years-to-life. Miller spent the next two decades at prisons including Sing Sing and Green Haven. In 2004, Miller first went before the parole board, maintained his innocence for Rabbi Okunov's murder and was denied release, a process that repeated in his next two appearances.

In 2010, the board finally approved Miller's release, despite his continued refusal to declare guilt. According to Sister Mary Ross, one of the parole-board commissioners who supported the successful bid, "many prisoners, even if innocent, will eventually say they are guilty, simply to give themselves a better chance at release." Miller, however, remained steadfast.

**Brooklyn's Black population in 1980 was nearly 33%, while whites were just under 50%.*

LIFE AFTER PRISON

After getting out of prison, Miller found jobs at a liquidation warehouse in Sunset Park and working with seniors in Fort Greene. Released from parole in 2019, he has spent the last few years living with his wife in Warwick, NY, near the New Jersey border. This past March he was laid off from his most recent job as a mechanic at Pep Boys. "It's pretty tough to get hired when you've been convicted of killing an elderly religious leader," says Miller.

After unseating longtime Brooklyn DA Joe Hynes in 2013, Ken Thompson made a splash by creating the Conviction Review Unit (CRU), which exonerated over a dozen people in his first two years in office. Miller, serving as his own lawyer, asked the unit to investigate his case, placing emphasis on the fact that Sperlin did not testify. In late 2014, CRU deputy bureau chief Eric Sonnenshein cast doubt on Miller's innocence, asserting that since the "jury obviously rejected your alibi claim," Sperlin's testimony would not have made a difference.

Miller's recent interactions with the CRU were handled by exoneration attorney James Henning, who gathered important, previously-unknown facts about the investigation. Two months before the trial, Sperlin went to the DA's office to discuss the case. But Henning says that it appears that Prosecutor Newman tried to conceal this fact from the defense, because it made Sperlin an even more favorable witness for Miller.

"Mr. Sperlin steadfastly declined to speak with the CRU," ADA Rachel Kalman-Blustein informed Henning while closing Miller's case this past March. "Unfortunately," she added, "I doubt you would have any better luck than I did."

Henning's team, however, has indeed spoken with Sperlin. Private investigator Dan Levine recently visited the rabbi at his Crown Heights home. According to Levine, Sperlin is deferring to the wishes of Rabbi Okunov's family, who continue to view Miller as the killer of their beloved elder. In his discussions with the Okunovs, Levine says that he has been appealing to their "sense of justice."

Another significant fact that Henning recently uncovered was the role of future Detective Louis Scarcella in the investigation. After cops first nabbed Darryl Brown, a detective interviewed Scarcella, who was then a member of the precinct's anti-crime unit that kept track of various local suspects. The degree to which Scarcella helped steer the investigation to Miller is unclear. The CRU did not attempt to interview the notorious detective, although that was also the pattern in the unit's most recent Scarcella exonerations.

Kalman-Blustein further advised Henning that CRU investigators tracked down Darryl Brown and confronted him "face to face," but he "refused to speak." Henning is skeptical regarding that explanation, noting that "in my experience, when a civilian is unwilling to be interviewed, that has not ended the unit's efforts."

Meanwhile, Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez's office provided the following statement to *The Indy*: "The CRU conducted a complete and thorough reinvestigation of this 44-year-old homicide, reached out to all witnesses and spoke with everyone who was willing to be interviewed. Its investigation failed to uncover a reason to disturb the jury's finding of guilt."

Henning's next step will be to initiate a post-conviction proceeding through Brooklyn State Supreme Court, which even in the best-case scenario would take at least three years to complete. By contrast, the CRU can overturn a conviction in a matter of months.

BACK IN CROWN HEIGHTS

At the end of August, Miller gave *The Indy* a tour of the Crown Heights locations relevant to his case. We chatted with three friendly, curious Orthodox women outside of 565 Crown St. Miller then showed us the place around the corner on Troy Avenue that was once a muffler shop owned by Isaac Shocaid, who hired Carl as a mechanic and later attended the trial. A few doors down stands the apartment building where Louis Fazio lived.

After we walked by the murder site at 808 Montgomery St., Miller took us to the area down the block where Darryl Brown claimed to have watched Carl shoot Rabbi Okunov. Even in broad daylight, it was hard to see many clear details.

It was even more difficult to believe that an actual murderer would serve as a tour guide at the scene of the crime.

Dustin Bailey contributed research assistance to this report.

BACK IN CROWN HEIGHTS: *Carl Miller, 62, points to the then-vacant apartment where cops arrested Darryl Brown as the initial lead suspect in the murder of Rabbi David Okunov.*

DEVASTATED: *Carl Miller reacts to his guilty verdict while supporters of Rabbi Okunov look on.*

PAGE 1 NEWS: *The cover of the October 25, 1979* New York Post.

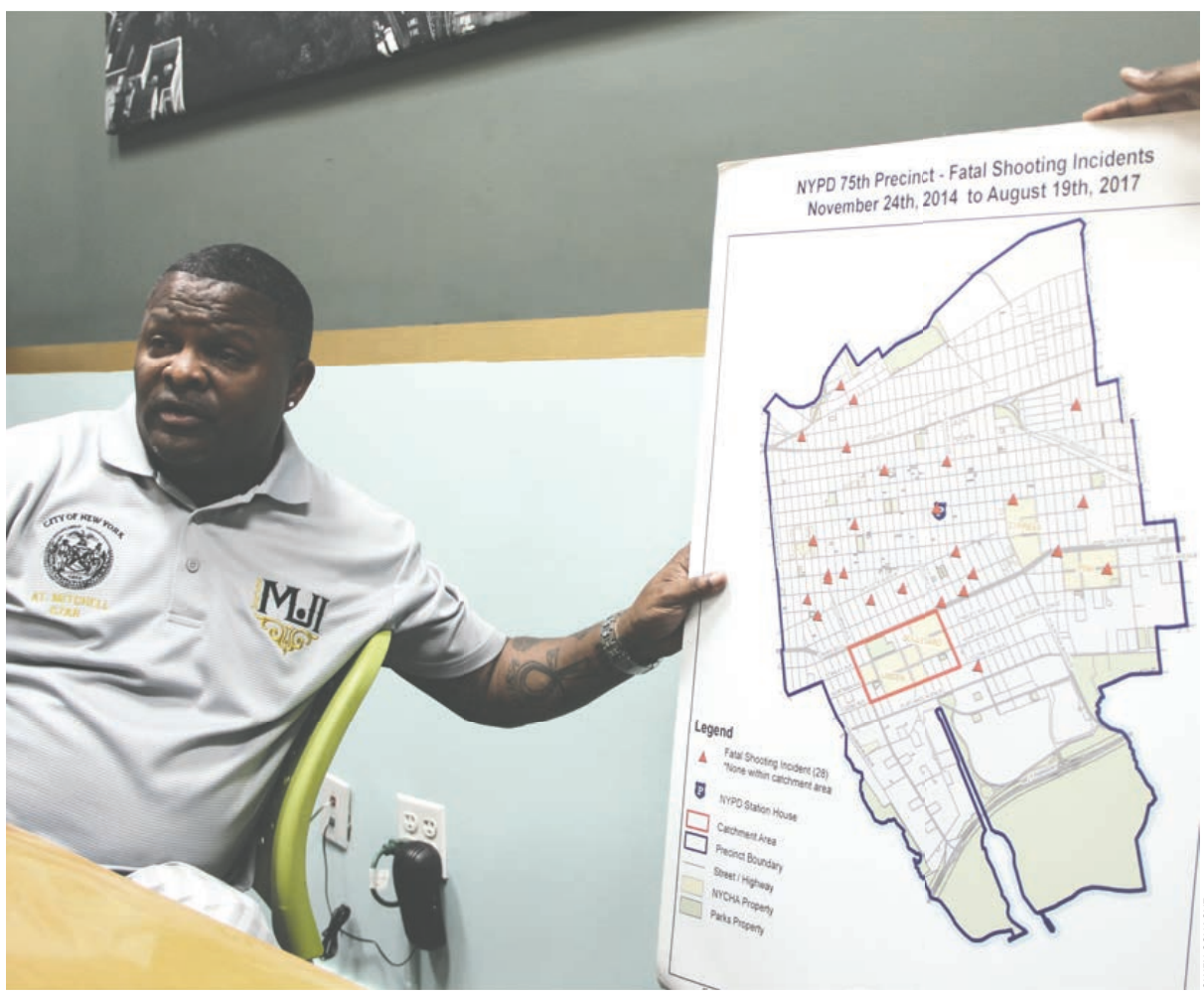
Law and Disorder radio
Listen to the show each week and download podcasts at
lawanddisorder.org
"Law And Disorder is an excellent magazine-format radio show hosted by five progressive lawyers."
AMY GOODMAN
Host, Democracy Now!

Law And Disorder **is as radical as reality itself. We broadcast on 151 stations around the country. We believe that ultimately capitalism is not compatible with democracy, fascism is. We chronicle the crisis of crashing democratic and economic rights in America and talk to people about "what is to be done." We broadcast a one-hour show every week.**

NOW ON FACEBOOK.COM

SUBSCRIBE TO THE INDY
$33 — 10 ISSUES
DELIVERED STRAIGHT TO YOUR HOME EVERY MONTH
INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE
OR SEND A CHECK TO
THE INDYPENDENT // 388 ATLANTIC AVE., 2ND FL. // BROOKLYN, NY 11217

OWEN SCHACHT



OWEN SCHACHT

ALTERNATIVES T POLICING

VIOLENCE INTERRUPTERS USE THEIR COMMUNITY TIES TO PREVENT CRIMES BEFORE THEY START

By Lydia Wei

In October of 2022, Hassan Nixon was attending a repast for a friend who had recently passed away. Friends and family members were gathered outside on the street in the chilly autumn air, finding solace and community in each other's presence, when suddenly the sound of gunshots broke out. A group of kids had passed by, shooting, and an attendee at the repast was shot.

Nixon was chilled by what had happened. The very next day, he walked over to Elite Learners' Brownsville offices to see what he could do to help his community.

Nixon had initially heard about the organization while serving time in prison for drug-related offenses. "I used to put a lot of negativity in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn in my years coming up," said Nixon. "I wanted to see what I can do to help change the narrative. As you get older, you start being more conscious of what's going on and the impact that you have in your neighborhood. And then being in prison also, you just see there's so much negativity in there with the youth, what's influencing them."

Now, Nixon works as a violence interrupter with Elite Learners, a nonprofit founded in 2015 that provides community programming and anti-violence initiatives. Elite Learners has 20 violence interrupters who work between Prospect Lefferts Garden, East Flatbush and Brownsville.

"A lot of people don't trust police. Nothing good really comes from reaching out to police. People here are killed by police," says Nixon, who responds to calls to help mediate potentially violent situations in his assigned catchment area in Brownsville.

Andre Mitchell was already doing anti-violence work in 2003 when a stray bullet killed an eight-year-old in his neighborhood. The next year he founded Man Up!, a nonprofit that provides youth programs, employment training and anti-violence work similar to Elite Learners.

Man Up! has catchment areas throughout Brooklyn, including Brownsville, East New York, Canarsie and Bedford Stuyvesant. Its office in East New York is lively: As families pick up their kids from the summer youth programs, parents talk to the staff, catching up on what their children did that day. Young men stop by the office, saying "Hotep!" to the workers.

"I mean, I lived out here my whole life," Mitchell told *The Indypendent*. "So it wasn't like I was expecting for someone to come from afar and help us because it wasn't happening. So I like the fact that we, the people who actually have been out here that are closest to the problem, are the best ones to create a solution."

A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Organizations such as Elite Learners and Man Up! follow the Cure Violence model, which treats violence as a public health emergency and aims to shift away from heavy policing. The program was founded by epidemiologist Dr. Gary Slutkin, one of the first figures to promote violence interruption work in the 1990s. It debuted in West Garfield Park in Chicago, where it helped reduce shootings by 67% within its first year, according to the Cure Violence Global organization, founded by Slutkin.

In New York City, there currently exist around 30 nonprofits doing Cure Violence work, which can range from job training to reentry services for formerly incarcerated individuals to anti-violence initiatives.

The crisis management system of Cure Violence focuses on "interrupting" the spread of violence by hiring credible figures within the neighborhood — either former gang members or individuals who have experienced the criminal justice system — to act as violence interrupters that mediate conflicts. These violence interrupters, who are unarmed, speak directly with at-risk individuals and attempt to stop shootings before they occur or respond to shooting scenes to prevent further retaliation.

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, who has vowed to lead the "most progressive" prosecutor's office in the country, credits his

TO

work with community-based organizations Elite Learners and Man Up! in helping reverse the spike of gun violence from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the DA's office, homicides declined by 8% in Brooklyn between 2021 and 2022, and shootings declined by 13%. Additionally, East Flatbush was highlighted as one of the most notable neighborhoods, seeing a 50% decrease in gun violence; Brownsville and East New York also saw decreases of 18% and 12% respectively.

'THIS WORK IS 24 HOURS'

Staffers at Elite Learners and Man Up! work with adolescents and young adults who live and go to school in the neighborhood, many of whom endure poverty and other issues at home.

Violence interrupters might take kids to basketball games or help them look for work. One youth didn't want to go to school because he didn't have any clean clothes to wear. Robinson provided him with some of his own clothes, as well as a place to stay.

"This work is 24 hours," says Hassan Nixon. "Some of these kids call me at 12, one o'clock in the morning; they hungry, or they somewhere they don't want to be. 'Could you come get me?' and I come pick them up."

"We see these kids outside every day. Some of them might just be chilling on the basketball court and we just sit," Nixon told *The Indy*. "I sit down, I shoot the breeze with them, and they ask me questions and I don't ever lie to them. I tell them exactly who I was and what I've been through, and some of them, they'd be curious, they ask me, What made you want to change? And I always let them know, it's for y'all."

The youth that violence interrupters work with tend to appreciate having someone to talk to who is from where they're from and can empathize with their struggles.

"They think that they're the first person that went through something. So it's like, I may use my past just to get that connection so they can relate, tell them how to get out of these situations," said Andre Robinson, a director of the crisis management system at Man Up!.

"You have to be consistent with your conversation with them," continued Robinson. "Plenty of people tried to have conversation, plenty of people came in and out of their lives acting as if they were going to really truly help them."

Robinson told *The Indy* about Jason, a 21-year-old who joined Man Up! three years ago. At that time, Jason was affiliated with a gang and gravitated toward the street. Jason's father was killed when he was young and his sister was later shot, and "when things happen and you're angry and you're young, you look to push that anger somewhere, though it comes out the wrong way," says Robinson, who was the one that found Jason and welcomed him into Man Up! Jason has become an active participant in the organization — he even hosted and spoke at Man Up! panel held for people who were victims of gunshots.

PREVENTING CRIME IN REAL TIME

The crisis management system relies on an innate understanding of the way crime often unfolds in low-income neighborhoods. Workers with both Elite Learners and Man Up! pointed out that violent incidents often blow up from minor conflicts that are publicized and exacerbated on social media.

"Street credibility is a real thing," explained Jeremy Arce, a director of crisis management with Man Up!. "If someone says, 'Man, somebody just disrespected that dude and slapped him,' now you open up the window for someone else to maybe put their hands on you or disrespect you the same way. That's the mindset, right? That's what brings in the retaliation."

The interrupters from Elite Learners and Man Up! shared experiences during which violence nearly broke out from a simple incident — a dispute over gambling in a park, a brush against someone while leaving the corner store, something incendiary said on social media. In each case, the workers located the individuals involved and spoke with them to try to deescalate the situation.

Nixon recounted an incident from February, when rumors had circulated that one man's girlfriend was seen with another man; the man who thought he was being cheated on got a gun and shot the other man, injuring him. The following day, Nixon sent all parties involved, including the girlfriend, a text saying to give him a call.

"I'm well respected in my area. If I ask them to call, they're going to call me," said Nixon. He scheduled time to speak with everyone separately and heard their perspectives. Nixon then brought the three together to talk in a safe, public space, a community center in Brownsville.

The incident had been a misunderstanding, they discovered, exacerbated by the rumor mill. Nixon made sure that such was understood by all parties, and they agreed to move past it, preventing further retaliation.

Many of the violence interrupters follow the youth they serve on social media in order to keep up with them and try to discern whether fights or arguments will erupt. By choosing to first converse with people who might commit violent crimes, violence interrupters help them avoid harmful encounters with the police, who almost always arrive on scene once a crime has already occurred.

"What we're trying to do is build a relationship where it's not just, lock up everybody and let the judicial system sort them out," said Patrick Griffin, an outreach worker supervisor at Elite Learners. "We want to … change a person's life before they become incarcerated for the rest of their life or, even worse, lose their life."

DISTRUST OF THE POLICE

The NYPD acts "almost like an occupying force in your community," Andre Mitchell told *BK Reader* in 2020.

For Man Up! and Elite Learners, keeping members of their community out of the criminal justice system is critical: In neighborhoods such as East New York, Brownsville, East Flatbush or Bedford-Stuyvesant — all of which experience high rates of police misconduct complaints, according to a study by the ACLU of New York — crossing paths with the police can lead to harmful or life-threatening incidents. A separate study, conducted by the Police Scorecard Project, found that between 2013 and 2021 over one million arrests were made in New York City for low-level, non-violent offenses and that Black people were 6.7 times more likely than white people to be killed by police.

NEW PARADIGM: *Violence Interrupters at Man Up! Are able to do things the police can't.*

VISIONARY: *Man Up! founder and executive director Andre Mitchell.*

A data dashboard published by the nonprofit New York City Criminal Justice Agency showed that of the 92,000 people arrested last year in the city, 2,505 were arrested five or more times. What's more, the most serious charges that most people in that repeating group faced were misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies.

Camara Jackson, the founder of Elite Learners, said that the organization has been called by community members about shootings and domestic and school-based violence, as well as by businesses that have conflicts in their establishments.

General distrust of the police in heavily patrolled areas means that workers with Elite Learners and Man Up! respond to a wide variety of calls: "I had an elderly person call my office because he fell in his apartment," Jackson told *The Indy*. "He didn't want to call the police and he called us, and we sent a violence interruption team directly to his apartment, and the guys aided him and we called an ambulance."

"Sometimes kids run away and the parents don't want to call the police and they call us, and we're in the streets looking for these kids," Jackson added.

Violence interrupters recognize, though, the difficulties of the work. "We can't save everybody," said Robinson, reflecting on the young man to whom he loaned clothes for school. "He found a new group of friends and started hanging out with them and didn't want to come to school anymore. Unfortunately, he was one of the ones that I couldn't help."

Nixon also highlighted the emotional toll of attending the various events that are organized in response to shootings, where they experience parents grieving the children they've lost to gun violence.

Ultimately, the organizations cannot function fully outside the system. For example, if an active weapon is present at the scene, violence interrupters with Elite Learners and Man Up! cannot immediately respond, since their workers are unarmed. In these cases, callers must be referred to the NYPD.

Organizations such as Elite Learners and Man Up! provide a crucial glimpse into a different future by illustrating that there are ways to ensure safety beyond militarized police forces and mass incarceration. Though the work is difficult, violence interrupters hope that more neighborhoods across the country will be able to adopt their non-violent methods.

"We want to live in healthy communities, like everybody else," Mitchell says. "We just want to be left alone. We want to be able to take care of our families."

COP CITY UPDATE

On Aug. 29, Georgia State Attorney General Chris Carr filed RICO indictments against 61 people associated with the Stop Cop City Movement. Stop Cop City/Defend the Atlanta Forest has galvanized opposition over the last two years to the building of the nation's largest police-training facility on the site of the nation's largest urban forest.

The RICO charges are dated back to May 25, 2020, the day George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officers. In previous bond hearings for Stop Cop City activists, Deputy Attorney General John Fowler argued that the movement is directly connected to the George Floyd Uprising.

Protesters are being prosecuted for activity such as donating to bail funds, self-publishing magazines and distributing fliers about Tortuguita, the forest defender who was sitting in their tent with their hands up when they were shot fatally by George State Police in January.

Since December, 43 Stop Cop City protesters have been charged with domestic terrorism, and, if convicted, face up to 35 years in prison. They were all included in the new indictment. In June, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security contradicted law-enforcement officials in Georgia over their classification of activist groups opposed to the police training center as domestic terrorists.

On Sept. 7, just eight days after the RICO filing was announced, five Cop City activists, including two ministers, bravely broke into the construction site of the planned facility and chained themselves to a bulldozer. They declared it to be a "people's injunction" against the project going forward.

On Sept. 11, the Vote to Stop Cop City Coalition in Atlanta submitted more than 116,000 signatures to put a referendum on the ballot for local voters to choose whether or not the mammoth police-training facility should be completed. But Atlanta officials refused to accept the signatures, claiming organizers had missed an Aug. 21 deadline that had previously been extended.by a federal judge. As The Indy *goes to press, the case is being reviewed by a federal appeals court.*

– AMBA GUERGUERIAN

JOHN TARLETON

WALK THE LINE: *Striking SAG-AFTRA members picket outside Netflix offices in Lower Manhattan.*

WHAT THIS STRIKE TAUGHT ME

SOLIDARITY IS THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

By Peter Carellini

Three days out of the week, I pull myself out of bed at 7:30 a.m., grinning and getting pumped up as I hop on the A train to lead SAG-AFTRA picket lines as a strike captain at HBO and Amazon headquarters on West 33rd Street. There await thespians of every age. Some are friends and others are strangers, but that is all irrelevant once I pick up the megaphone — our shared anger rises as the picket resumes for another day. We build our rhythm together as we curse Hollywood executives Bob Iger and David Zaslav, and suddenly things seem far from grim. When drivers pass by and honk, the whole world feels united in solidarity.

I remember falling asleep the night before the SAG-AFTRA strike was announced; it was akin to a thorny election eve, or last sleep prior to a live performance, in which my stomach churned and I dreaded what would come in the morning. I'd only been in the union for six-and-a-half months and now, my healthcare eligibility, my income was to be in jeopardy? My dreams of being involved in labor action aside, and the necessity of strikes notwithstanding, I felt a deep unease — especially after seeing how studios were responding to the ongoing writers strike that began May 2.

And the next morning I awoke to a text from my ever-vigilant father informing me that yes, I was on strike.

In that moment, the dread was gone; unexpectedly, I began to bubble with excitement. It occurred to me that the strike meant more than a fight for a fair deal.

As the casual cruelty of studio executives started to leak to the public, I saw a larger picture. Labor actions were increasing in a way they had not in decades. The recent labor organizing of UPS drivers, train workers, Amazon workers, Starbucks baristas and hotel workers, just to name a few, has been making headlines. Now, 160,000 of us actors and 11,500 screenwriters are on strike at the same time, affecting the country in an omnipresent fashion: For the first time since 1960, all of Hollywood is on strike — and the strike is on your screens.

I'm excited to see some beloved high-paid actors taking for the first time a firm public stand against aspects of capitalism. Whether they are guided by altruism or a keen sense of self-preservation, they are participating in a massive labor action for all to see.

Labor action has not been, for lack of a better word, *cooler* or more widespread in most Americans' lifetimes, and hopefully that trend is just beginning to rise.

Our strike began on July 14. We're forcing AI into a retreat, to the sound of cheers. We're roaring defiantly at the wealth hoarding of CEOs and large shareholders, rather than letting them continue to slyly destroy our livelihoods, to the sound of cheers.

The the industry that has essentially raised generations of youth is making a stand. My own conservative, Reaganlionizing relatives have cheered me and my fellows on. Watching grossly overpaid studio bosses flail and panic in real time while their matinee heroes and dream makers unite in solidarity was good old-fashioned entertainment the whole family could enjoy.

Now in my third month of striking, I do wish I could return to work, to a steady income. And yet still, as I lead picket chants and I turn my head to look at my comrades, I feel a wave of hope unlike any other in my lifetime.

RWDSU

PUSHING BACK: *Unionized workers at the SoHo REI store went on a one-day strike on Sept. 9 to protest cuts to their pay.*

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

NLRB ORDERS EMPLOYER TO BARGAIN WITH UNION

The National Labor Relations Board has set new rules intended to discourage employers from using illegal tactics to stall union campaigns. On Aug. 25, it ordered a concrete company that had threatened to close plants if workers voted to join the Teamsters Union to recognize the union and bargain with it. The decision included two new rules: First, if an employer's violations are bad enough to void an election, it will have to recognize the union, instead of a second vote being held. Second, if a majority of workers sign union-authorization cards, the employer must either recognize the union or request an election within two weeks. "The penalty for poisoning the well," Teamsters lawyer Caren Sencer told *Work-Bites*, is no longer "more time to rerun an anti-union campaign." The Cemex Construction Materials company, which spent more than $1 million to hire a "union avoidance" firm, has challenged both rules in federal court.

NY STATE BANS 'CAPTIVE-AUDIENCE MEETINGS'

Gov. Kathy Hochul has signed legislation prohibiting employers from forcing workers to attend "captive-audience meetings" where they have to listen to anti-union messages. "It's critical we unionize more workers," she said at the New York City Central Labor Council's Labor Day Parade breakfast at 32BJ SEIU's Manhattan headquarters. State Senate Labor Committee chair Jessica Ramos (D-Queens), the bill's lead sponsor, told *Work-Bites* that the new law would mean "workers are not forced to endure anti-union propaganda and the intimidation that comes along with it." The governor also signed bills to make wage theft a criminal offense and to increase workers' compensation benefits for injured low-wage workers. In 2014, the federal Department of Labor estimated that workers in the state are cheated out of as much as $1 billion a year in pay. Ramos said that employers should face "more stringent penalties" for wage theft, such as having their business licenses taken away.

MORE NEW SCHOOL STUDENT WORKERS DEMAND UNION

Some 900 student workers at The New School are trying to join ACT-UAW Local 7902, the union that represents the university's part-time faculty, academic student workers such as teaching assistants and research assistants, and student health center providers. The New Student Workers Union, composed of non-academic student workers such as resident advisers and print-shop staff, filed the petition with the National Labor Relations Board in August. The university administration has refused to recognize it, arguing that they are not genuine employees and that they belong in a separate union because they have different responsibilities from academic workers. "They made it clear that the university's leadership intends to obstruct our legal and human right to form a labor union, and to that we say: Our rights can't wait!" the union said in a statement.

REI WORKERS HOLD ONE-DAY STRIKE

Workers at the REI outdoor-equipment store in SoHo walked off the job on Labor Day, Sep. 9, to protest the company rescinding a raise they got last December. The company had agreed to give them the same raise nonunion workers had received, in exchange for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union agreeing not to strike. But REI cut their pay on June 1, the day the agreement expired, claiming it had been "temporary." Steve Buckley, a member of the store's bargaining committee, said his wages had been slashed by almost $3 an hour, to $19.76. "We were engaging in our rights, and they retaliated by punishing workers," he told *GearJunkie*. "They think that's the best way to discourage other organizations." The SoHo store was unionized in March 2022, and has been followed by at least seven others. REI accused the union of seeking "to inflame tensions." On June 1, it hired Morgan Lewis, a law firm specializing in "union avoidance."

WHEN NYC STOOD WITH CHILE

In this special section, co-sponsored by *The Indypendent* and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, we delve into the landscape of the New York City movement in solidarity with Chile in the tumultuous aftermath of the Sept. 11, 1973, coup that saw the overthrow of President Salvador Allende's democratically elected government and the rise of General Augusto Pinochet's oppressive dictatorship. Fifty years later, we honor the sacrifices and draw inspiration from the enduring legacy of New York's solidarity actors in their pursuit of justice and democracy amid one of Chile's darkest chapters.

The global movement standing in unity with Chile initially surfaced while Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular democratic socialist government (1970–1973) was in power. The UP's victory in the 1970 presidential election and Allende's unwavering commitment to forging a democratic path toward socialism garnered substantial attention and empathy worldwide. The government's imperative to build a more equitable society led by the working class served as inspiration for countless individuals beyond Chile's borders during the short period of Allende's administration.

The news of the military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet on Sept. 11, 1973, sent shockwaves across the world. The oppressive Pinochet dictatorship, which subjected thousands of Chileans to torture, murder, and disappearance, ignited international resistance to his illegitimate government. Standing in support of the Chilean people, New Yorkers felt compelled to respond. Amid the upheaval and repression in Chile, New York City became one of the centers for exiled Chileans seeking safety and support. Various solidarity initiatives blossomed throughout the city. Leftists, artists and exiles emerged in this context as key protagonists in a multifaceted movement that sought to amplify the voices of those suffering in Chile and challenge the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Pinochet regime.

The solidarity movement with the Chilean people also played a crucial role in enlightening Americans about the extent of U.S. imperialism's influence in Latin America. These groups exposed the immoral strategies employed by the U.S. government and corporations to safeguard their economic and political interests and the consequences of U.S. interference in foreign governments.

This special section looks into these New York's networks and the pivotal role they played in raising awareness. As we uncover stories of solidarity in action, we witness how the boundaries of nationality, language and culture dissolved, and a profound sense of interconnectedness took root. New York's response to the Chilean coup epitomized the true spirit of internationalism, showcasing the power of collective action in advocating justice on a global scale.

Performers bid goodbye to the audience at An Evening with Salvador Allende, organized by Phil Ochs with Friends of Chile, Felt Forum at Madison Square Garden, New York, May 9, 1974.

Solidarity Initiatives

AN EVENING WITH ALLENDE CONCERT

The Friends of Chile, An Evening With Salvador Allende Benefit Concert, on May 11, 1974, was one of the main international acts in support of Chilean exiles, the first to attempt to rally global rejection of the established dictatorship in the country, and the first to openly criticize and confront the intervention of the U.S. government in the military coup that had overthrown Salvador Allende a year earlier.

The event, held at Madison Square Garden, was organized by U.S. protest singer Phil Ochs and Chilean actor and poet Claudio Badal. Ochs, motivated by his interest

Continued on next page

in Latin American political processes, had visited Chile in 1971 to closely experience the labor and university movements. A close friend and admirer of popular Chilean communist singer, poet, and actor Víctor Jara, Ochs was moved to organize the benefit concert after the Pinochet regime kidnapped, tortured, and executed Jara in the aftermath of the coup.

The evening featured an eclectic and wide-ranging lineup with Arlo Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Dennis Hopper, Bob Dylan, Swedish diplomat Harald Edelstam, Gato Barbieri, and others. Allende's widow, Hortensia Bussi, was present at the venue. The Living Theater, an American experimental theater company, staged a vivid reenactment of the tortures described by former prisoners of the Brazilian dictatorship (1964–1985), which was also devastating that South American country at the time.

MURALS FOR THE PEOPLE

Following the 1973 coup, a group of intellectuals, artists and other cultural workers organized a solidarity initiative to replicate a mural originally created by the Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP) in New York. The original mural had been destroyed by the dictatorship upon taking power.

BRP was a muralist brigade associated with the Chilean Communist Party. Established in Chile in 1968, the BRP was responsible for producing murals in various public spaces throughout the country, conveying social and political messages. Following Pinochet's coup, the regime launched a concerted effort to eliminate all forms of leftist art and culture, which included the whitewashing and erasure of BRP murals.

In a show of solidarity with Chile's resistance movement, a group that included important figures of New York's cultural scene, such as art critic Lucy Lippard, art historian Jaqueline Barnitz, exiled filmmaker Jaime Barrios, and Chilean artist Enrique Castro-Cid, issued a call to join a protest against "censorship, book- and art-burning, and the arrest of artists and intellectuals in Chile." Organized under the name Concerned Artists from the US and Latin America, the group invited New Yorkers to recreate a 100-foot-long mural that had been destroyed by the regime. This mural, originally located at the Mapocho River in Chile, was reproduced on West Broadway between Houston and Prince Street.

ARTISTS FOR CHILE

Orlando Letelier was a Chilean economist, politician and diplomat. In 1971, he was appointed ambassador to the United States by Salvador Allende. Back in Chile in 1973, Letelier assumed various key roles within the government. After the coup, he was swiftly apprehended by the military authorities. He was among the initial members of the Allende administration to be detained and subsequently incarcerated in a political prison. During his year-long captivity, he endured imprisonment in different concentration camps and was subjected to torture.

THE MILITARY COUP THAT OVERTHREW CHILE'S DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT ON SEPT. 11, 1973, IGNITED INTERNATIONAL RESISTANCE.

Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre reenact torture on stage at An Evening with Salvador Allende, organized by Phil Ochs with Friends of Chile, Felt Forum at Madison Square Garden, New York, May 9, 1974.

Critics of the Chilean regime protested the presence of the* Esmeralda *in the bicentennial parade of ships on July 4, 1976. The boat was previously used as a site to torture political prisoners.

The protest against the* Esmeralda *was held at Pier 86 on Manhattan's West Side where the "torture boat" was docked.

Part of the audience at the Velada (evening) dedicated to Pedro Lastra, organized by the Pablo Neruda Cultural Center at the loft of Marcelo Montealegre and Silvia Doris Dillems Quezada, SoHo, New York, 1979.

After mounting international diplomatic pressure that included the mediation of the governments of Venezuela and the U.S., the regime agreed to release him on condition that he leave the country. Forced into exile, Letelier moved to the U.S. and took an academic post in Washington, D.C. There he became a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies.

On September 21, 1976, Letelier was killed in a car bombing in Washington in a politically motivated assassination orchestrated by agents of the Chilean military regime. The bomb was planted in his car, and upon detonation, Letelier and his IPS colleague Ronni Moffitt were tragically killed. Even beyond Chilean borders, Pinochet's regime demonstrated the lengths it was willing to take to suppress opposition.

After his assassination, a group of artists from the US Ad Hoc Committee of the Museo Internacional de la Resistencia "Salvador Allende" organized an art exhibition and benefit event at Cayman Gallery in New York for the "Chile Committee for Human Rights" in memory of Letelier, showcasing artworks from American and Latin American artists.

Nitza Tufiño, Nuyorican artist, co-founder of El Museo del Barrio and member of the political-artistic collective Taller Boricua, was one of its organizers.

THE ESMERALDA SHIP PROTESTS

The Chilean naval ship "Esmeralda" was slated to participate in the July 4th Bicentennial parade of tall sailing ships on the Hudson River in 1976. The vessel had previously been highlighted in a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States as a floating detention facility where political prisoners were subject to torture by electric shock, beatings and high-pressure water hoses.

> *"The four-masted barquentine Esmeralda, Chile's envoy to Operation Sail, has become the object of protests here by groups charging that political prisoners were tortured aboard the ship," the New York Times reported.*
>
> *"There would be good reason to protest any Chilean ship coming here," Susan Borenstein of the National Coordinating Center in Solidarity with Chile told The Times. "Its presence would make a mockery of the very principles of democracy and human decency our nation is celebrating in this Bicentennial year."*
>
> *According to The Times, Action for Women in Chile, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Amnesty International, religious groups and others expressed their opposition to this symbol of the Chilean military regime in New York City and organized a protest at Pier 86 on Manhattan's West Side. The National Council of Churches submitted a draft resolution to the New York City Council calling on Mayor Abe Beame to deny access to the ship to any city-owned facility.*

(The New York Times: *'Four Master From Chile Is Called Torture*

Continued on next page

Ship' June 20, 1976. 'Fete for Chilean Naval Ship Faces Protest' June 26, 1976.)

VELADAS POLITICAS

Chilean photographer Marcelo Montealegre has been living in New York City since 1968. In the aftermath of the coup, Montealegre joined the movement denouncing Pinochet's dictatorship in the city and documented a large part of the political and artistic activities that took place in that context.

By the end of the 1970s, along with other Chilean artists such as filmmaker Javier Barrios (who arrived in NYC in 1977), he began organizing monthly meetings at his loft in Soho, nicknamed Veladas (evenings). In these gatherings, recent exiles and activists shared and discussed news about the current situation in Chile. They called the space the Pablo Neruda Cultural Center.

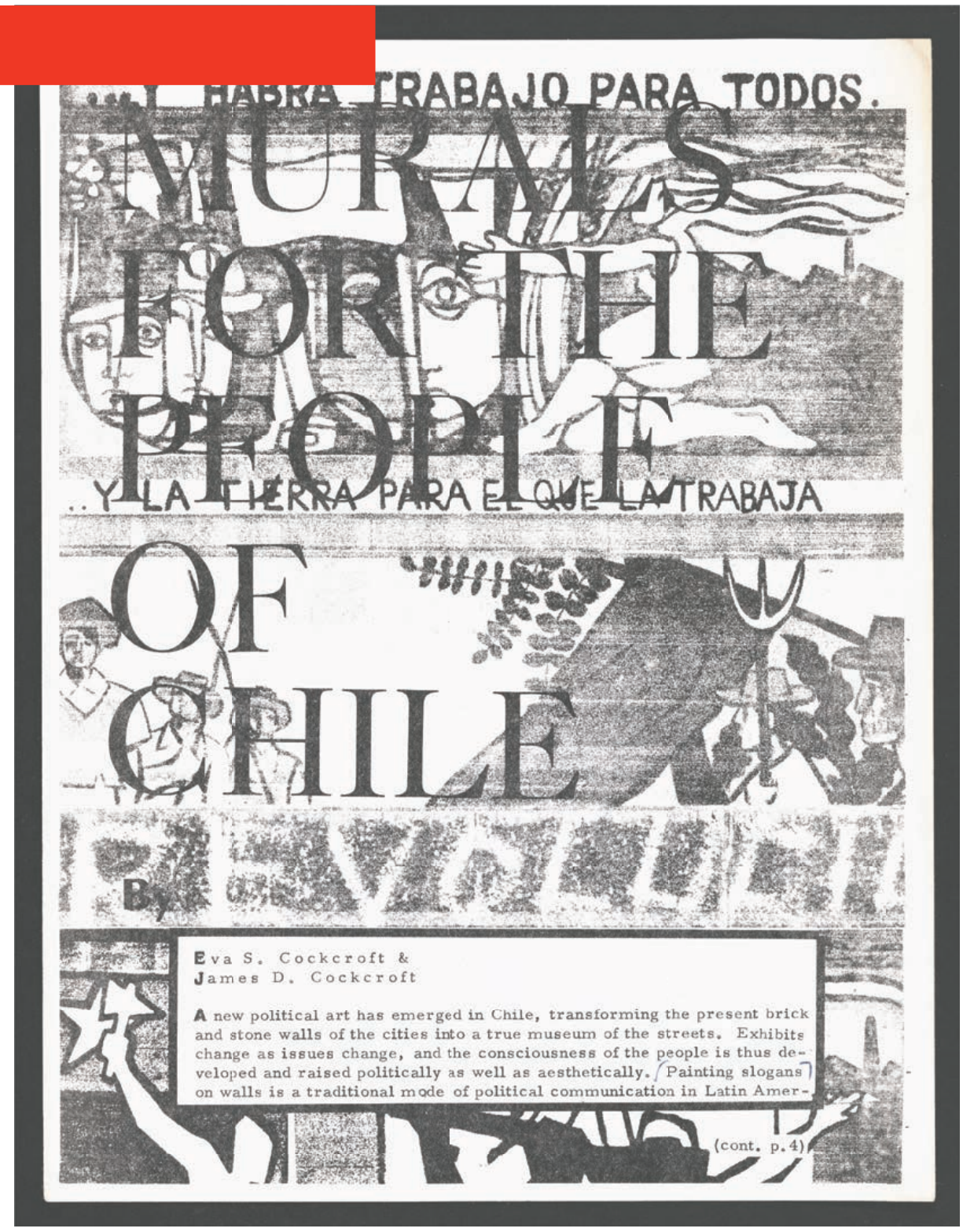
As the news of the activity started reaching other groups, Nicaraguans, Salvadorians, Argentinians, and other Latin American exiles joined the meetings, eventually transforming them into a political and art center for Latin American solidarity in New York City.

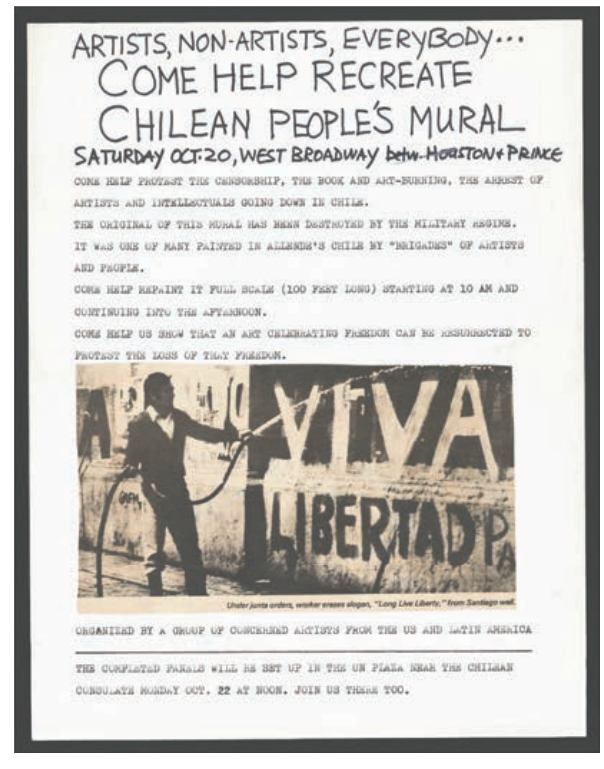
Cover of Eva S. and James D. Cockcroft, "Murals for the People of Chile," in Toward Revolutionary Art, no. 4 (1973): 2-11. Lucy R. Lippard papers, 1930s–2007, bulk 1960–1990.

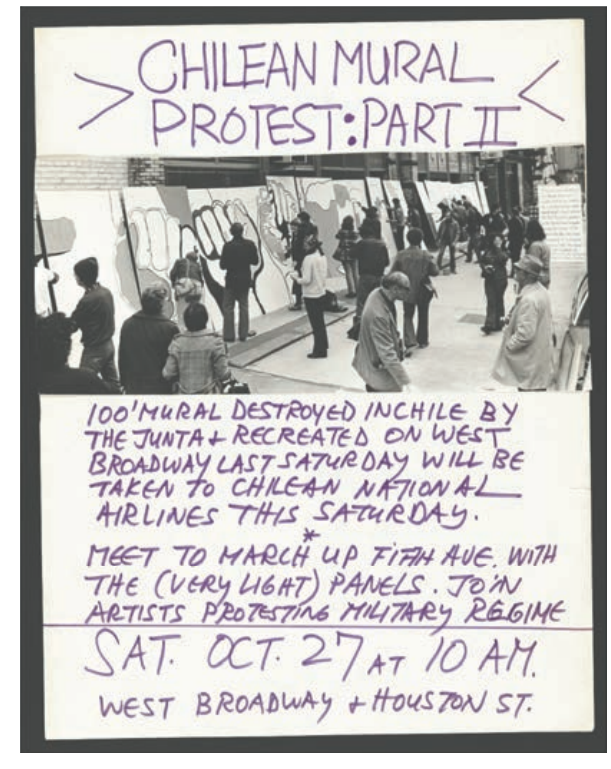
On October 20, 1973, New Yorkers gathered on West Broadway between Houston and Prince St. to recreate a 100-foot long political mural in Chile that was destroyed by the military regime.

A leaflet made without computer software urges people to come out for the Oct. 20 mural action.

The final step in the mural making came on Oct. 27 when the panels were presented to representatives of the Chilean National Airlines.


HABRA TRABAJO PARA TODOS.
MURALS FOR THE PEOPLE
..Y LA TIERRA PARA EL QUE LA TRABAJA
OF CHILE
By
Eva S. Cockcroft &
James D. Cockcroft
A new political art has emerged in Chile, transforming the present brick and stone walls of the cities into a true museum of the streets. Exhibits change as issues change, and the consciousness of the people is thus developed and raised politically as well as aesthetically. Painting slogans on walls is a traditional mode of political communication in Latin Amer-
(cont. p.4)


ARTISTS, NON-ARTISTS, EVERYBODY...
COME HELP RECREATE
CHILEAN PEOPLE'S MURAL
SATURDAY OCT.20, WEST BROADWAY betw. HOUSTON & PRINCE
COME HELP PROTEST THE CENSORSHIP, THE BOOK AND ART-BURNING, THE ARREST OF ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS GOING DOWN IN CHILE.
THE ORIGINAL OF THIS MURAL HAS BEEN DESTROYED BY THE MILITARY REGIME.
IT WAS ONE OF MANY PAINTED IN ALLENDE'S CHILE BY "BRIGADES" OF ARTISTS AND PEOPLE.
COME HELP REPAINT IT FULL SCALE (100 FEET LONG) STARTING AT 10 AM AND CONTINUING INTO THE AFTERNOON.
COME HELP US SHOW THAT AN ART CELEBRATING FREEDOM CAN BE RESURRECTED TO PROTEST THE LOSS OF THAT FREEDOM.
VIVA
LIBERTAD
ORGANIZED BY A GROUP OF CONCERNED ARTISTS FROM THE US AND LATIN AMERICA
THE COMPLETED PANELS WILL BE SET UP IN THE UN PLAZA NEAR THE CHILEAN CONSULATE MONDAY OCT. 22 AT NOON. JOIN US THERE TOO.


CHILEAN MURAL PROTEST: PART II
100' MURAL DESTROYED IN CHILE BY THE JUNTA + RECREATED ON WEST BROADWAY LAST SATURDAY WILL BE TAKEN TO CHILEAN NATIONAL AIRLINES THIS SATURDAY.
MEET TO MARCH UP FIFTH AVE. WITH THE (VERY LIGHT) PANELS. JOIN ARTISTS PROTESTING MILITARY REGIME
SAT. OCT. 27 AT 10 AM.
WEST BROADWAY + HOUSTON ST.

SOURCES:
Iglesias Lukin, Aimé. This Must be the Place: An Oral History of Latin American Artists in New York, *1965-1975. New York: Americas Society/ISLAA, 2022.*

Power, Margaret. "The U.S. Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s." Latin American Perspectives, *vol. 36, no. 6, 2009.*

The New York Times *Archives*

CREDITS:
Research & text by Mariana Fernández

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
NEW YORK OFFICE
With support of the German Federal Foreign Office

TYRONE WALLACE

‘YOU’RE TOLD THIS IS THE WAY TO BE SUCCESSFUL’

STUDENT LOAN DEBTORS WEIGH OPTIONS AS PANDEMIC DEBT PAYMENT MORATORIUM EXPIRES ON OCTOBER 1

By Keating Zelenke

“I’m thinking about the interest that’s going to be accruing, on top of each loan, and I’m like, okay, that’s going to total maybe $1,000 a month,” says Rachel Jerome of the upcoming federal student-loan payment resumption.

After Jerome earned her bachelor’s degree, she realized that her career goals were much different than when she was 18 years old. She wanted to switch gears and go back to school for a master’s in strategic communications, so she attended an online program at Syracuse University while working full-time at a nonprofit and living with her parents.

COVID-19 induced a federal moratorium on student-loan payments and interest in March 2020. Collection on Jerome’s $65,000 federal loan was frozen, a welcome relief for her and the nearly 45 million people in the United States with federal student-loan debt.

As pandemic restrictions loosened, Jerome found a decent job in her field. At 28 years old, she was finally able to move out of her parents’ home and live on her own for the first time. She found a one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx that she could afford and even decided to adopt a dog. What didn’t go toward her private loan payments, rent or other necessary costs went into her savings account. Jerome opened a retirement account, her mind on her future.

The federal government’s decision to end the moratorium is like pulling a block from the foundation of Jerome’s meticulously stacked Jenga tower. With payments slated to begin again on Oct. 1 — the COVID emergency 0% interest rate was already rolled back in the beginning of September — her financial planning is set to crumble.

Even with Jerome’s $75,000 salary, loan payments and rent combined will account for almost half of her income after taxes. She’ll have to cut down on her other regular costs, and the small amount of savings she’s worked for these last three years will likely be depleted within a few months.

Living in New York City has become increasingly difficult, even for a local who completed a graduate program at a well-regarded university: “I can’t really have a social life too much,” said Jerome. And “transportation, like commuting around the city, I have to be very strategic about that as well,” a situation made more difficult by the recent MTA subway and bus fare increase. Jerome says she will likely have to cancel her gym membership “and cut down on groceries.”

Such sacrifices to one’s personal health help explain why, according to a comprehensive 2021 report by the American Public Health Association, indebtedness is a risk factor for poor health, including high blood pressure, obesity, inflammation and even a lowered life expectancy.

“The first thing you’re told once you get out of the womb, anywhere you go, is to get an education,” Jerome said. She feels like she’d done as she was told, and is now facing the consequences.

Amy Osika agrees on this point. “You’re told this is the only way to be successful,” she says. Between her undergraduate and graduate school loans, she borrowed roughly $200,000. And due to accumulating interest, Osika’s balance has only grown since she graduated with her second master’s degree in 2021. She made payments whenever she could, but still owes an estimated $238,000 in total.

After earning her bachelor’s degree in 2013, Osika began making payments on her $30,000 undergraduate loan, but was unable to find a job that paid enough to keep up. She went back to school to become more marketable to well-paying employers — and took out over $100,000 in additional loans from the federal government.

Osika completed her second advanced degree in 2021, but has been unable to find work in her field of anthropology. She bartends, does temp work, makes and sells art — anything to help pay the bills — but she still makes less than $10,000 a year. She lives with her partner of over a decade, who is luckily able to pay rent and support their combined living costs, but can’t afford to help with her debt.

Osika constantly worries about going into default. Defaulting on federal student-loan payments can result in a number of serious consequences — the loss of the debtor’s ability to borrow money anywhere or to purchase and sell assets, the garnishing of wages, and the withholding of the debtor’s college transcript.

Osika’s mother, a public-school teacher who took out a second mortgage on the family home in order to cosign on the $30,000 undergraduate loan, is also held responsible for each late or missed payment.

“[My mother] has helped me so much in a way that has debilitated her financially,” Osika said. She explained that she is hyper-aware of how loans of her size turn debtors into a burden to the people around them.

Mike McGuirk, 35, also needed his parents to cosign his $150,000 private loan for his undergraduate education. As a freelance filmmaker, he has always struggled to make consistent payments — right now, he’s completely out of work due to the actors’ and writers’ strikes taking place across the country.

“Beyond the monetary payments and financial burden, it’s put a tremendous amount of stress between myself and my parents,” McGuirk said.

Around 90% of private student loans are cosigned, most often by the student’s parent or guardian. In a LendEDU report from earlier this year, roughly a third of the cosigners surveyed indicated they did not fully understand the risks of helping secure their student’s loan. Around half of the cosigners surveyed said that their child’s debt has thrown their retirement plans into jeopardy, and 35% regretted their decision. McGuirk’s private lender has taken to frequently calling his father, who has Alzheimer’s, bullying the family into making payments that McGuirk had advised them not to.

If he knew then what he knew now, McGuirk says he never would have taken out those loans. “I don’t necessarily regret my educational experience,” he said, “However, I’m very disheartened by Columbia College [Chicago], as I am many univer-

Continued on page 20

TINA SUNDELEIUS

THE YOOPER LIFE: *It's easy to lose yourself in nature in Michigan's UP.*

AMBA GUERGUERIAN

DOWNTOWN: *Iron River, Michigan*

JOURNEY TO RURAL AMERICA

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VISITING FAMILY IN MICHIGAN'S UPPER PENINSULA

By Amba Guerguerian

"So, callers, let me know what you think, are we gonna have a civil war?" a radio talk-show host asked as I was driving in Brooklyn the other day. My mind traveled to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Flying over New York City in an airplane, you see blocks of gray and snaking cement with small moving dots speeding along; a sea of lights, barges coming into ports of trade. Flying over Michigan's Upper Peninsula, you see a vast land of green speckled with the blue of lakes. Or, in the winter, all white.

My mother grew up in this forgotten corner of America, and I return in the summers, as I did as a child, to visit my extended family of Yoopers (as the people of the Upper Peninsula call themselves). They live in Iron River, a town of 3,000 people that embodies both the joys and the frustrations of life in rural America.

Iron River was a mining town settled in the late 19th century by poor European immigrants like my great-grandparents, who were recruited from Italy to come and toil in the mines. The work was hard and dangerous.

The iron ore the men pulled out of the earth was melted into pellets, shipped to factories and used to build America — "from its railroad tracks to its skyscrapers," says Deborah Davis, an Iron County Historical Museum volunteer. "There is very much a sense of pride and respect for how much work these individuals did."

Those achievements came at a cost to the workers. Injuries were frequent in the mines, and death wasn't uncommon. Having a union kept the exploitation from being worse.

"They wanted more money for the dangerous job they had. I remember my dad coming home injured; a big hunk of rock fell on his back. It was worrisome," a longtime family friend, Eve, told me.

Her husband John's father, who worked the overnight shift, came home with bandages sometimes. One night, he left work early because he lost a finger. "He was in the other room, and I could hear him moaning and groaning because of the pain," remembers Jim. "I would have nightmares sometimes about him … I always worried about him not coming home."

The mining companies never came back after they left Iron River in the 1960s — a source of collective pain the older generations refer to often — and the town fell on hard times that continue to this day.

Nearby towns consolidated because they were so underfunded. There's one stoplight in the whole county; crumbling houses are up for auction; community centers and town halls are boarded up.

While I was a child, the bowling alley I used to go to with my friends burned down. When I was a teenager, the movie theater closed. Then, the store where you could buy new clothes closed, and most recently, the local family grocery store, Angeli's, turned into a Super One.

"When we lost our mom-and-pop stores, it was a huge change that riddled the community," my mom recalls.

"You have to leave Iron River to buy a pair of jeans or a pair of tennis shoes," says my Uncle Vinny.

FOND MEMORIES

While Iron River's older residents have lost a lot, they still have their memories — of a bustling downtown where working-class people spent their money at local shops, and of an active childhood spent mostly outdoors.

"When we got home from school," my Uncle Vinny remembers, "the first thing you did was take off your school clothes, and then you did your homework, then you grabbed a quick meal and it was out the door."

"At night, all us kids would spend hours at the community center ice rink. We had so much fun," Eve recounted. "We didn't have a lot of money, but we had a lot of kids, and there were a lot of people, and there were a lot of things that the community did."

"We would stay outside until dark, or past dark, in the wintertime — until the siren went off and Bimbo [the town police officer] would make sure we all got home," added my mom, who moved away after high school. "Why would we want to be inside? It was crowded, and we hardly had any toys."

TO STAY OR LEAVE?

When I ask my cousins and their friends why they left Iron River, or why they plan to, and when I ask the older generation why they stayed, the responses never change.

Young people leave for greater opportunities. According to my cousin Brett, "There's *no* work, and there's *nothing* to do."

"There's no big nightlife. There's not people from all different cultures. It's kind of a bubble," adds my cousin Mickey.

On the West Iron County Chamber of Commerce website, there are many job postings, and I did notice "help wanted" signs during my recent visit, but, "a lot of the kids that I grew up with went to college to get the education to do a certain type of job, and maybe they don't have that job here," says Mickey. "Not everyone wants to work construction. Not everyone wants to work in the logging industry. Not everyone wants to work in the welding trades."

For those that stay in Iron River, a connection to nature and community keeps them there. They have a deep relationship to the land. People hunt and fish; they search for mushrooms in the woods and crawfish in the rivers. They raise livestock, pickle, can, make wine and tinctures, trade with their neighbors. Because it's so far off the beaten path, you feel an exhilarating sense of freedom. Even the people who leave tend to come back regularly, or move back when they retire. The place has an addicting quality.

FROM FDR TO TRUMP

Beginning with Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal in the 1930s, Iron County voted reliably Democratic, including for Barack Obama in 2008. However, that flipped in Donald Trump's two presidential runs, when the descendents of union miners came out in droves to vote for a gaudy Manhattan billionaire who would garner 62% of the vote in both races.

Why did this happen? Nostalgia for when local industry was thriving and downtown was bustling? Is it because Trump gives voice to a nativist impulse that sees today's desperate immigrants as different from those of the past? Or because Trump simply bothered to act as if he cared about people in places like Iron River — something no Democrat has done in a generation.

Iron River local Kathlene suggests that support for Trump is due in part to a deep-seated distrust toward government that goes back to the immigrant laborers who "left places where the government was very invasive and very controlling."

Many say it's about guns. "These are people who live and die by their guns. They've always been hunters, and they're so worried the Democrats might take their guns away, even though it's never been done and nobody's ever tried," says my Aunt Giulia.

The kids there now, many of whom support Trump, still resemble their fellow Gen Zers. They're on TikTok; they don't go outside as much. I asked my 16-year-old cousin, Bow, what his first reason for liking Trump is, and he said guns. He doesn't express animosity toward gay or trans people or people of color in the same way older right-wingers do. One of his cousins is gay and another is trans. That's just a part of life, he says.

But, Bow likes the country kids. "You're either country or you're emo," he says. That is also a political divide, though the pot smokers linger somewhere in between.

When I asked him what he and his friends thought of the economy and unions, he said, "As long as we have some money in our pockets, we're happy," which is funny to me, because it seems like the most pressing issues in Iron River are economy-based.

Continued on page 21

CHRIS DALTON

LYNCHIAN: *Heavy rain turned desert sand into a quagmire at this year's Burning Man festival.*

BURNING MAN, LOST & FOUND

By Nicholas Powers

We stood at the edge of camp and looked at the coming storm. Mr. Fix-It and I heard radio reports about bucket dumping rains headed to Burning Man. Above us, dark clouds curled into fists.

Trey, Mello and I circled the 100 foot long shade structure, a box-like fort of tarps, straps and bolts. We looked like sailors battening down the hatches of a ship. Rain needled our faces. Wind pawed the tarps. Soon, all 30 campers scrambled to secure tents, stack chairs and haul the kitchen under the main tarps.

Lighting flashed like the sky was being ripped. Blinding rain made the earth into mud. We couldn't see. Or walk. Trapped inside the shade structure, we all turned up the music. Aliyah and Drake, Afro-Deep House, we even sang old spirituals. It was like Noah had a House Party on the Ark.

Deep into the night, cold and soaked, I looked at everyone. We sang and drank and danced. We strung lights. We teetered on ladders to drain the ceiling tarps that bulged with rain. We hugged and laughed.

We "lost" Burning Man. And found it again.

MUDAGEDDON

On Saturday, Sep. 2, tens of thousands of people at Burning Man stepped out of tattered camps, surveyed the muddy landscape and asked the same question. How the hell are we getting out?

It turned out the rest of America asked too. CNN, BBC, the *New York Post*, Fox News ran Labor Day articles about Burning Man, the massive festival held each year in the Nevada desert. A palpable curiosity brimmed in the media. Were the 73,000 attendees going to die en masse? Go full *Lord of the Flies* and gnaw on raw legs and arms?

One of the leads, Adrian aka Mr. Fix-It, a svelte engineer who designed the camp, told me the news. We laughed. What we felt was not panic or anger. Laughter peeled like rose petals from mouths. Burners waved to Burners shouting, "Fuck your Burn!" who smiled, gave the middle finger back and shouted, "Fuck yours, too!"

A dizzy, crazy, silly, drunk freedom intoxicated us. The thunderstorm freed us from the Burn. The rage-all-night Burn, the FOMO Burn, the Try-Everything-With-Everyone Burn that was a roulette wheel of LED lights, drugs, music and sex spinning faster and faster around the Man sculpture at the center until it was set ablaze on the final night of the gathering and burned down in a glorious crash of fire. That Burn was done. Washed away.

The Burn now was survival. Until the gates opened, until the ground dried, we had to feed and care for each other. Ration food. Share propane to cook. We had to give, give, give.

Burning Man is a kaleidoscope of camps that combine into a city and now that city was on a cliff edge. Pushed by climate change. Pushed the great distance between us and outside help. At my camp, the leads met. Tray aka Bugzy and Mello did construction. Mello, a tall brotha, butter pecan skin and cherubic face. He switched from jokes to wisdom mid-sentence. Trey, mahogany-toned and Hollywood handsome, had a gentle authority. Heather aka Dr. Who, the organizer, herded newbies and vets to get their shit together and listen. And then me, the camp founder.

We called a meeting and faced a circle of anxious faces. I told them my priority was to get everyone out. I told them I had been in disaster zones and worse than hunger or injury were the psychological wounds of being betrayed. I told them organize groups, fix the camp, prep for the next storm and as soon as the ground dried, get the fuck out of Dodge.

New leads stepped from the circle; Jasmine, Dave, Tim, Matt, Two-Dicks and Ti-Ti. They enlisted people and in minutes the camp was an ant colony. Individuals formed chains that passed metal poles and wet tarp. In the call-and-response, in the muscles straining, a beautiful feeling rose into the sky. Trust.

Trust sparked in a thousand gestures. Each time a heavy weight balanced between hands, trust. When medicine and electronics were secured, we felt trust. When we peeled soggy carpets from the mud, more trust. At the end of the day, we stood back and marveled. The camp was erect and ready for the rain sweeping up the Playa, the ancient lakebed that is home to Burning Man.

When the rain came, we played poker and dominoes, drank Hennessy and tequila. We cornrowed hair. Sunflower put on a playlist. When "Hey Mr. DJ" by Zhane hit, heads flowed on the beat like buoys on the sea. When "That's the Way Love Goes" by Janet Jackson hit, we leaned back like air dancer balloons in front of a store. It was a vibe.

Other Burners saw our joy and came to join. I slipped away to my car. I took out a photo of my son. It would be days before I saw him. I had his sock and smelled it and was transported to Brooklyn, where I held him to my chest. I told him I missed him. Looking at the party going, I said to him that he had a new family.

SALVADOR DALI WITH PLAY-DOH

We had to see what the deal was. Tim and I trod to the exit gate outside Burning Man. On the way, a Burner waved comically to stop, so we stopped and saw on the ground a "Human Snail Race." Swimming in the mud, dressed as snails, a dozen Burners raced each other to a non-existent finish line. We laughed and laughed.

Joy. Everywhere, joy. Tim and I got to the road leading out of Burning Man. It was a soggy mess. R.V.'s spun their wheels. In the distance, the drivers looked like tiny dolls next to a Hot Wheel truck, frozen in the act of pushing forever.

We got back to camp, told everyone the news. A few had left already. Each one who got free was one less person to worry about. Testing the mush with my foot, it squished, and I knew it would be another day.

I went to the porta-potties, most, caked with mud and shit piled like volcanoes. One was my favorite. A Burner re-made it as the *Love Boat* sitcom. The cast was on the wall and a ship's steering wheel. A poster showed guest stars from the 70's and 80's. I loved those actors. When you closed the door, the *Love Boat* song played.

Sitting on the toilet, I saw those actors like dust blown by time. Maybe it was the mud on the road or the mud on my hands. All of it temporary. Like this city. Like this life. I wanted to hear the *Love Boat* theme but it was broken. So, I sang it, loud. I sang for everyone who made it. I sang it for everyone who didn't.

EXODUS

Monday, Sep. 4 the sun blazed in the sky. Heat baked the mud but just its surface. One inch down was gooey. I heard engines vroom as Burners rushed to escape and RVs spun wheels. I tied plastic bags to my feet, ran to the Burning Man radio station, jumped on-air and yelled to chill, to practice Tantric Exodus. The DJ and his friend snickered

Continued on page 23

NYC'S UNDERGROUND MUSIC

By Lydia Wei

It's 11 PM on a Saturday night, and the Union Square L train platform is swarming with Brooklyn-bound clubbers. Over the heat haze of hundreds of tightly packed bodies, a strange sound, like a deep-bellied groan, rises from the center of the platform. Following the music that rings and echoes around the cavernous station leads to a mysterious man. He plays some type of instrument — more a contraption, really — that looks like one of those old light microscopes from a high school biology class.

His name is Ken Arii, and he is the subway busker responsible for the haunting music tonight. Though his presence might get lost in the hubbub of the crowd, to stick around and listen to his music provides a chance for unexpected meditation on a late weekend night. Here, we speak to a collection of subway buskers — including a blues piano player, an experimental cello-maker, a singer-songwriter, and a psychic rapper — to learn more about their worlds.

GABRIEL ALDORT

New Orleans blues piano player; subway busking since 2010
galdortmusic.com

I chose to commit myself exclusively to a path in music in 2010. That's when I auditioned for the Music Under New York program. One cool thing that I'll always remember is that the auditions used to be held in the esplanade level of Grand Central, which was the last year that they held them there. After that, the Apple store came in and took over that space. But it was cool, like a balcony that nobody really knew how to get up to. You had to find this little hidden elevator.

When I made the cut, I was overjoyed but super nervous. I'd never played in the subway before. The first spot I ever played in was Penn Station. That spot is still there; they call it Long Island Railroad #3, because there are multiple spots in the terminals.

If you're a consistent Music Under New York artist, the city will periodically throw you opportunities such as performing at luncheons, award ceremonies, station reopenings, ribbon cuttings. The MTA will cherry pick their favorite artists for those events. One of the coolest opportunities I've ever had was for Billy Strayhorn's centennial. You know he wrote that famous song with Duke Ellington, "Take the A Train." So the city rolled out the old A trains from like the '30s or '40s, and they peppered the cars with Music Under New York musicians. And of course we played Strayhorn, Ellington tunes.

If I told you the list of weird things that I've been tipped … Somebody tipped me an ounce of gold once. When I was packing up, there was a little green square envelope in my tip bag, with a little heart drawn on it in ballpoint pen. I could tell there was probably a coin in there, and it was really heavy. And I slid it out. It was really orange. I was like, What the hell is this? I don't know if you've ever seen pure gold. It's like really orange. And it had a maple leaf on it. Turned out it was a Canadian maple ounce of gold. I took it down to the frickin' Diamond District, 44th St. Some [jeweler] behind a glass counter checked it, then fanned out $1,300 in cash.

I've gotten all manner of food and beverages. Somebody put a six-pack of non-alcoholic beer in my bag. A bulb of garlic. I've gotten hot dogs, sandwiches, water. Bananas. I used to get little handwritten notes like, Thanks, you made my day.

A key to increasing my tips is audience engagement. Acknowledgement is paramount. As humans, we're all fundamentally afraid of each other on some level, especially in New York. But when I'm playing, I see someone, I nod my head and I smile in acknowledgement. Nine out of ten times that wall of defense comes down, and there's a person there that just digs your music. But I like just having fun with people, keeping it light. Oozing love and positivity, because I'm a bleeding heart humanitarian to the max.

ALLEXION X

Live music performer and original songwriter; subway busking since 2009
@axx.music on Instagram

In 2009, I had just come out of college. And even despite the financial crisis, those first few years — 2009, 2010, 2011 — were good years of busking for me, like the kind of money that just made me think, Man, I don't have to get a job. Those were my playing-on-the-trains-and-going-to-restaurants days. Me and my best friend would go to every restaurant in New York City off the 1 train because we were making so much money. We'd just get off the train and go to a nice fancy restaurant and enjoy the best meal ever, get back on, and just keep singing. This is probably why I have reflux now. You know, in hindsight maybe I should've bought a house. It was just this beautiful excitement then.

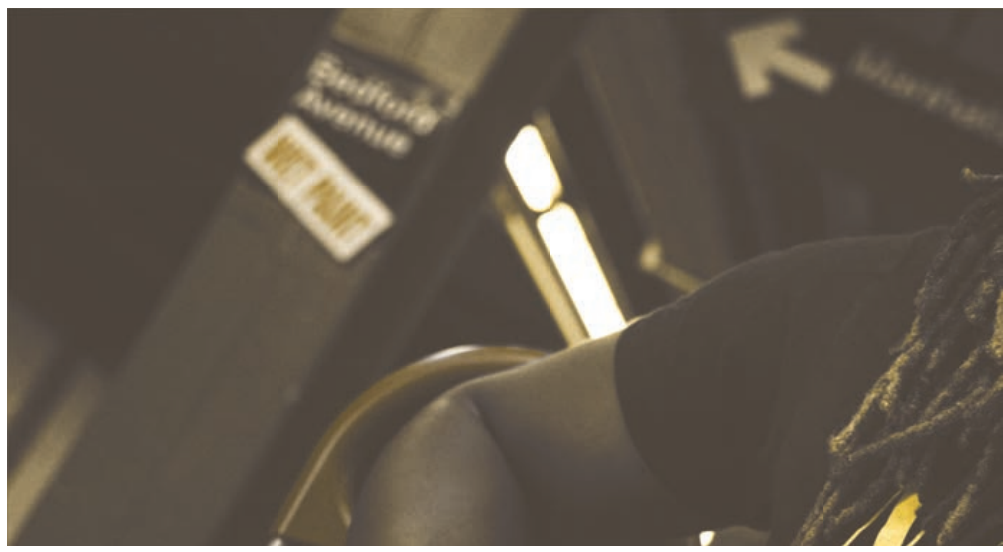
My coolest experience was busking on the Staten Island Ferry. We were passing around the offering plate, and there's so many people on the ferry, and we probably made $100 off one trip. We would just sing anywhere.

Back in 2009, the money was three times as much. Right now is a tough time for everyone, food is more expensive, so people will hold on to money more. I remember back then, I would get so much more change, like literally coins … Everyone has on headphones now, so they have the freedom to ignore what is happening around them. So I feel like you're also competing with technology.

Being on the platform, you get to interact with a lot of the homeless people. They see you in that space, kinda hustling like they are, and they feel more familiar, so you're more open to talking to them and they're more open to talking to you. It sucks that sometimes they can feel invisible. You see people ignoring them, you know?

I remember one time I was playing and this homeless guy came up and gave me a bunch of his change. I was like Man, no, you don't have to do that! And he said No, no, you made my day, I really enjoyed your performance, and he was giving all that he had.

It's important to not cast anyone out. Nobody should be forgotten. Busking in the subways does keep you aware, it keeps you grounded.



JACOB COHEN

Cellist and experimental instrument maker; subway busking since 2010
@rabbistravinsky on Instagram

I started subway busking when I was living in this artist house in Harlem in 2010. I met a Brazilian violinist who was doing a lot of street performances. We got hired for some wedding, and to rehearse we went into the subway because he played in the subway a lot. I was amazed that we were making money.

At first I was playing classical music, but the train would be interrupting the songs all the time. And I never loved classical music that much, so I started to improvise in between the trains. I just fell in love with improvising. I wanted to keep on exploring what the cello could do, so I would just sit in the subway all day playing, trying to make money but also just exploring the possibilities of this instrument.

LAURA JANE BRETT

LAURA JANE BRETT

LAURA JANE BRETT

In 2015 I made my first experimental cello out of a small tin can. I used some twigs as tuning pegs, I carved them down; and I think I used toothpicks as frets. I just put it all together, I strung it up and it sounded pretty good. It really sounded like a cello.

I started experimenting with different materials. I've made cellos from tennis rackets, deer skulls, horseshoe crab shells, old olive oil cans. I use a lot of sticks from old mop handles to make the handle, the body of the instrument. I went to Brazil in February and I met this other instrument maker who taught me how to use plastic soda bottles. I hit the plastic soda bottle with a heat gun and it wraps itself around the tin can. The heat tightens it up and it has this weird effect where you can make it into a drum head. Then I learned how to solder and make these little contact mics, which I could use to make an electric cello. I got carried away during the pandemic; now I have 50 instruments.

Most of these objects I find while I'm walking around. The deer skull, I found when I went for a hike across the George Washington Bridge. On the Jersey side there's this amazing park that has cliffs, and there's a section off the path where I guess deer go to die. There's lots of bones. I found two deer skulls there. The tennis racket I found in the trash on the Upper West Side, it's like a bit of a fancy neighborhood. And I always just have my eyes open. In New York City, people throw away so much stuff.

KEN ARII

Ambient musician; subway busking since 2022
@ariijuice_missile on Instagram

What I do on the subways is an ambient style of music, with a mix of beatboxing. I use a SOMA pipe. It's made by SOMA Laboratory, a synthesizer maker from Russia. They make unique instruments. It's not just a pipe, or even synthesizers. It's more. I saw the demonstration video of the pipes, and it was shocking to me. It makes a big noise, a big sound. I was like, Yes, this is it. Right away I bought it.

My very first time performing was actually more than 10 years ago when I was playing noise music. I played guitar in Union Square with an old friend. We just wanted to make noise. Actually, a lot of people hated us because we were really noisy. We kept going for a while, until one day these undercover police showed up. They were like, What the fuck are you doing?! with handcuffs in their hands. They were about to arrest us. I just kept silent like, I don't understand what you're saying at all. They were looking at us for a while, and then I just left. I quit.

This guy, it was late night and he was maybe a bit drunk, he just sat on the stairs and listened to me for 30 or 40 minutes. He passed a few trains he was supposed to ride. That guy made me feel very good. Sometimes there's this weird guy screaming next to me. I don't know, I guess he's trying to sing with me.

It's always good on the L train platform late nights, like after 10. There are people like me all the time on the L train, so they like me more. Now I'm trying to make everybody know about me on the L train platform, all my L train people, my L train night people.

MOTOWN MAHDI

Singer, rapper, producer, psychic medium; subway busking since 2016
@multimahditv on Instagram

I'm a man of many talents. I'm a singer, rapper, producer; I can do everything when it comes to music. But I'm also a psychic medium. I can tell people what's going to happen in the future. So to sum up, I call myself a lightworker. I just give off light and I give off energy.

Actually, it's weird because I've kind of been psychic my whole life. In church they used to call me a prophet. And I can honestly say that I never missed a reading for anybody. I hit the lotto over a hundred times. I just hit the lotto yesterday. Lots of people like me to predict the lotto for them. I never missed a reading. And I actually channel passed ones from the other realms; so I channeled Michael Jackson, I channeled Prince. I saw Young Dolph's murder before Young Dolph's murder came to light. And I predicted that Donald Trump would go to jail. That's happening now.

I am an earth angel on this planet. I come from the seventh dimension. And I tell other people who they are. Like, when I meet them and they tell me what day they were born, I let them know, like, You do know that you're an earth angel, right?

When I perform, I smile at people and I give all good energy to people. I say nice shoes, I give people a compliment when they walk past. So when I give off that energy, I get that energy back.

I perform "Tennessee Whiskey" like 400, 500 times a day because that song actually brings in the most money. People love that song. Some of the MTA workers actually have to hear me sing that song back to back every day. Because a big mistake I made back in the day was singing my own songs, and people didn't know my songs. Now, what I do is, I sing the songs that everybody knows for like four or five hours. And then five minutes before I shut down, I sing my own songs. So I put my own music to the background. Because people actually buy my albums while I'm singing other people's songs. Which is backwards though, but I get it.

I dealt with racism with the police a lot. The police would shut down my shows all the time or they would meet me with the big police dogs. They liked to try to find drugs on me, but unfortunately I didn't have to sell drugs because I made music.

The police discriminate on hip hop acts. I realized when I'm singing country music, or I'm singing songs that other people know, the police don't bother me. But if you make it hip hop music, they discriminate on that. Because hip hop really don't like the police. Like the whole hip hop song is talking about, don't trust the police, and it really talks about police brutality and goes against snitching to the police. So the police discriminate against hip hop artists, or in general, all people of color. Unless you're a black artist singing "Tennessee Whiskey." They love that. When I'm singing "Tennessee Whiskey," they don't give me no problem. I learned that as well.

COIN OF THE REALM: *Gabriel Aldort once received a solid ounce of gold as a tip and cashed it in for $1,300.*

OUT Of REACH: *AlleXion X says it's becoming harder to connect with commuters because so many now wear headphones.*

MUSIC SUPPLIES: *Jacob Cohen makes his cellos out of olive oil cans, tennis rackets, deer skulls and whatever else handy he can find.*

SUBWAY BUSKERS TALK ABOUT THEIR ART, PERFORMING IN PUBLIC AND MAKING ENOUGH $$ TO SURVIVE AND EVEN THRIVE

STUDENT LOANS

Continued from Page 15

sities who are silent right now."

"I felt like I was almost a little bit bamboozled, or hoodwinked in a way," Jerome said. None of Syracuse's supposed "alumni resources" like networking or job fairs had helped her find employment. "I was out there fending for myself," she said.

Osika explained that The New School, where she earned her advanced degrees, told her she might be eligible for scholarships if she did well her first semester. With the hope of future financial aid, she decided to continue with the program. After she excelled that semester, she pursued the scholarships, but the school had rescinded their offer, Osika says. "You just feel like it's all been designed to screw you."

Osika is candid about how her debt has damaged her mental health. She and her partner have decided not to get married at this point out of fear her debt might destroy his finances as well, and they don't foresee ever being able to afford a house.

"It's hard to invest in myself because… it's never felt like any of my money was mine," said Osika, who began to cry when she confided that despite always wanting children, she worries about the life she'd be able to give them.

In addition to physical health, indebtedness has long been associated with negative effects on mental health — depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. A 2021 survey from Student Loan Planner found that one in 14 borrowers felt suicidal at some point in the repayment process — including during the federal moratorium. For some, these results illustrate that simply pausing student debt payments, as opposed to debt cancellation, is not enough relief.

The Debt Collective, of which both Osika and McGuirk are members, is a loosely-connected union of debtors that fights for debt cancellation en masse, as well as educating members on individual forms of resistance. The group was born out of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and their actions are inspired by the writings of anthropologist David Graeber (see sidebar). The Debt Collective has made headlines in the past for buying up debt on secondary markets, where it's sold for "pennies on the dollar." Then, the group completely forgave each borrower whose debt they had purchased.

The Debt Collective is also setting a primary example for the federal government, which has long had a "borrower defense" provision in place for students who were defrauded by their universities, but no straightforward method for appeal. As a result of several court decisions which ruled in favor of borrowers, the Debt Collective created an online form for eligible borrowers to directly appeal their debts to the federal government. That form is now the basis for the Borrower Defense Loan Discharge application on the government's financial aid site.

Lawyers and left-leaning politicians like Elizabeth Warren have theorized that another government provision, the 1965 Higher Education Act, gives the secretary of education the legal authority to "waive" student loan debt for any borrower, regardless of whether they were defrauded or not.

As a result, the Debt Collective rolled out another online tool at the end of August: the Student Debt Release Tool. Though it was designed with borrowers who have been paying off their loans for decades in mind, the format is customizable for each user. The form will generate an appeal based on your personal experience and the Higher Education Act, then send it directly to the Department of Education.

Braxton Brewington, a member of the Debt Collective, explained that the organization hopes this tool will get mainstreamed by the federal government, just like their last effort.

There are people that "have been trying to get public-service loan forgiveness for 10 years, or an income driven repayment plan for 20 years, and the plans just haven't worked," Brewington told *The Indypendent*. The Student Debt Release tool and other efforts by the Debt Collective, he says, are "really just accounting for how the program should have worked from the beginning."

In the first week after the tool launched, the Debt Collective recorded 17,560 applications for debt release through their website. Underscoring the mental-health impacts of debt, Brewington said that 234 of those applications contain the word "suicide" and 721 contain "depression." Other notable findings include 552 mentions of "unemployment," and over 1,000 mentions of "eviction" or "homelessness."

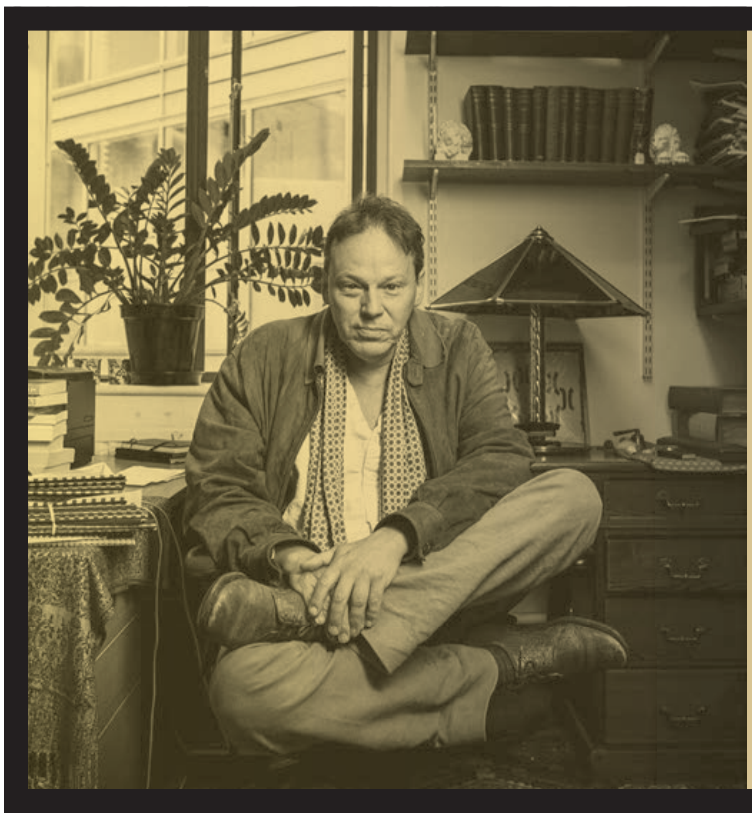
Amy Osika will likely be unable to make any payments in the coming months. She mentioned potentially consolidating her loans, but she fears that her mother could then be held responsible for all of her debt, not just the $30,000 she cosigned on for undergrad.

McGuirk, who is also unable to pay his loans, plans to continue applying to income-driven repayment (IDR) plans, and to any new forgiveness plans the Biden administration might propose.

Rachel Jerome plans on making payments this October by strict budgeting and utilizing her savings.

Of the six debtors who were consulted for this piece, Jerome is the only that intends to pay. Five of them are unable to make full payments on their loans — to do so would result in severe financial hardship. One, who asked to remain anonymous, is also not paying for political reasons. "I could pay for the next 20 years if I wanted to, but I still won't pay [my principal] down. What's the point?" said the debtor, who is 49 years old. "I would much rather take my money out of the bank, put it into crypto or hold it in cash before I ever pay another dime to student-loan people."

An August poll by Intelligent.com, a data-driven educational advice website, found that 62% of student debtors nationally intend to "boycott" loan payments this fall. Around half of the survey respondents indicated that they did not believe they could afford payments.



DAVID GRAEBER'S LEGACY

In his best-selling book, Debt: The First 5,000 Years, David Graeber argues that debt is a social arrangement that can be renegotiated. From ancient Mesopotamia onward, he notes, debts have repeatedly been erased when they become too burdensome and socially destabilizing.

Published in 2011, Debt came on the heels of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. The economic meltdown had been triggered by the reckless investments of large Wall Street banks who were rewarded with trillions of dollars in government bailouts. At the same time, millions of Americans who could no longer make their mortgage payments lost their homes. With good-paying jobs suddenly scarce for college graduates, many found themselves staggering under the burdens of student loan debt.

"We learned in 2008 that debts could be made to vanish if really important people want them to," Graeber told The Indypendent *in an August 2011 interview. "Once you know that, they can't play the same games they've always been playing."*

A month later, Occupy Wall Street burst onto the scene. What began as a single 24/7 protest encampment in Lower Manhattan quickly spread to more than 600 U.S. towns and cities. The Debt Collective sprang from this milieu. Graeber, who died in 2020, played a key role in some of the group's early initiatives – publishing a Debt Resistors Operations Manual that explained in clear language how to negotiate your way out from under a debt burden and the Rolling Jubilee, which used $750,000 in crowd-sourced donations to abolish $32 million in debt – before returning to his academic pursuits. The Debt Collective has since gone on to popularize the idea of universal student loan debt cancellation to the point where many former skeptics, including President Biden, have embraced some version of the idea.

For more, see debtcollective.org.

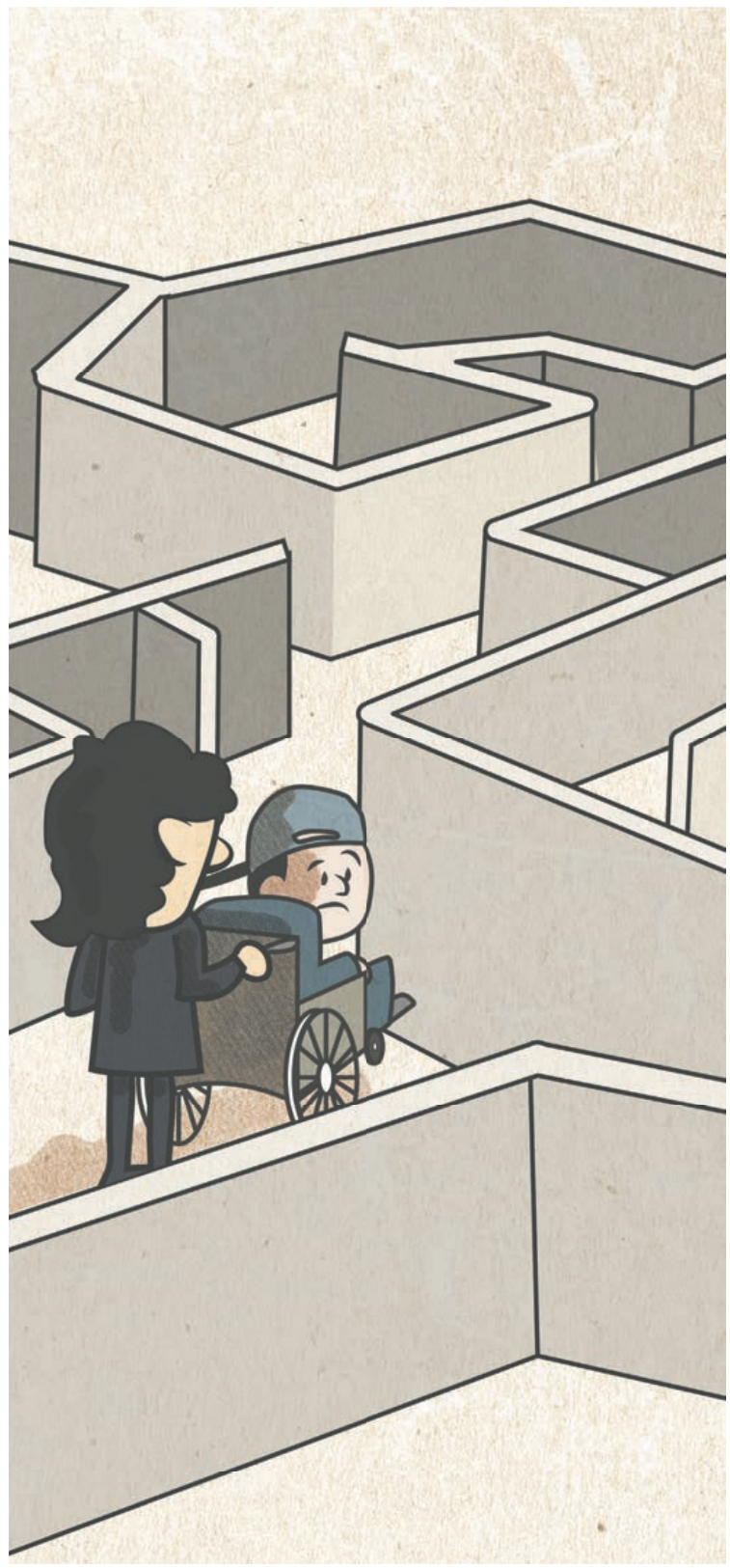
– JOHN TARLETON

CARE INC.

Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism
Premilla Nadasen
Haymarket Books, 272 pages

By Eleanor J. Bader

Barnard College Professor Premilla Nadasen's latest book, *Care*, zeroes in on one of the most salient ways that inequity is perpetuated in the United States, that is, "how care for some people is built on the backs of other, more vulnerable people."



GARY MARTIN

It's an obvious point, but by focusing on "social reproduction," the paid and unpaid work that supports and maintains the continuity of life — from pregnancy care, to childcare, to eldercare — she illustrates the way this works, slamming the unprecedented profits that have been made by agencies that send workers into our homes to clean, cook and attend to our kin.

Companies like care.com come in for a particular drubbing. Their work, she writes, takes advantage of desperation and is built on a racist and sexist foundation. In fact, the undervaluing of the largely immigrant women who provide care has had dire consequences for them and their communities, often resulting in poverty and family separation. Worse, workplace abuse is endemic.

But, Nadasen continues, there is recourse, sort of, thanks to welfare programs that are supposed to serve as financial backup when times get tough. Nadasen defines welfare — direct, albeit meager, monetary allocations through the time-limited Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), better known as food stamps; Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for low-income people who are too incapacitated to work — as a supposed safety net. While these programs are meant to allay destitution, they punish the poor through burdensome certification demands and provide more revenue to administrative entities than to those who are scrambling to make ends meet.

Nadasen's description of this and her rage over it are heartfelt. What's more, her reporting on the valiant efforts of welfare recipients, low-wage workers and progressive activists to demand adequate public benefits, or better, a guaranteed annual income, increased wages, and policies that address and punish workplace exploitation is inspiring. Nonetheless, it's clear that these efforts have fallen short of their aims.

Nadasen posits the blame for this squarely on our economic system. "The care economy and extraction of profit from social reproduction are not products of neoliberalism but of capitalism," she writes. "Even the liberal welfare state of the mid-twentieth century — which is celebrated for its support for social reproduction — further institutionalized hierarchy and inequality." It did this, she explains, by strengthening the symbiotic relationship between care provision and the market. As she writes, "Families must turn care work over to the market and enter the formal labor force in order to keep the economy healthy."

But what choice do we have?

While numerous care-collective and mutual-aid groups formed during the COVID-19 shutdowns, it seems naive to think that voluntary efforts can meet the growing needs of the country's aging population. Nadasen understands this. Nonetheless, she is leery of government. "The state and the market have always been intertwined," she writes. "The state has always been implicated in extracting profit from social reproduction and a care agenda is increasingly being embraced by the private for-profit sector with cooperation of government officials."

True, and while I agree that the idea of making a profit over something as essential as personal care is repugnant, the need is far bigger than our ability to meet it as individuals or communities. Instead, it requires a broad-based national strategy.

Nadasen concedes as much, writing that "we cannot reject all forms of governance."

Nor should we.

Nadasen and I are both cheered by the emergence of resistance movements and grassroots demands for affordable and available support, whether for a new baby or for a family elder who is suffering from a physical or mental infirmity. Where we disagree is over the role of government in providing it.

Perhaps I'm deluded, but I think it's possible for robust publicly-funded programs to flourish apart from the market. I know that this is a long shot, and will require a shift in priorities from financial gain for the few to care for the many. Still, letting government off the hook seems like a copout, and I, for one, am ready to go into the halls of Congress and loudly demand full funding for cradle-to-grave care. Want to join me there?

RURAL AMERICA

Continued from Page 16

Obviously I have different opinions than some of my family. But what are we supposed to do? Disown everyone we disagree with?

What I've been reminded from researching this piece is that we're all products of our environments, and that Donald Trump's messaging really resonates with some. Most of them are complex, decent people whose struggles are caused by the same ills that cause our urban struggle. They are our counterparts; they make up 18% of the country we live in, and I think we should try harder to understand them. I think it would be better if we could notice that we have a common enemy — the capitalist ruling class — than start a civil war with them.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Since 2020, there has been an uptick in new homeowners in Iron County. It seems to mostly be Boomers that grew up there returning to retire. There are also young families moving in that left urban areas during the pandemic and people from warm parts of the country buying summer homes to escape the heat.

"You don't know anybody anymore," says Aunt Giulia's friend, Rose, bemoaning the fact that she no longer recognizes nearly everybody when she goes out.

"You wouldn't believe how many Texas and Florida license plates I see up here," says Aunt Giulia.

In the coming decades, the Great Lakes region, with its temperate weather and abundant supplies of freshwater, may become a destination for a lot more people as climate changes intensifies.

"To tell you the truth, I think things are gonna look up for Iron River, basically because they are killing our planet," Aunt Giulia says.

"It's not good," she adds, referencing recent droughts, "because normally our peak fall colors used to be the first two weeks of October, then it switched to the last two weeks of September — now it's the first two weeks of September. And all of Uncle Bob's apples are dropping on the ground before they're ripe."

Names of family members and friends have been changed.

HELEN KELLER'S FORGOTTEN RADICALISM

After the Miracle: The Political Crusades of Helen Keller
By Max Wallace
Grand Central Publishing, 2023, 416 pages

By Jessica Max Stein

In December 2020, over 50 years after Helen Keller's death, the renowned deafblind woman became ensnared in controversy, as she often had in life. "Helen Keller is not radical at all," Black disability-rights activist Anita Cameron told *Time* magazine. "Just another, despite disabilities, privileged white person, and yet another example of history telling the story of privileged white Americans." Ironically, right-wing figures from Ted Cruz to Donald Trump, Jr. jumped in to defend Keller — a lifelong avowed radical socialist — from "wokeism." Around the same time, a viral TikTok video accused Keller of being a "fraud," arguing that no deafblind person could have written books, graduated (with honors) from Radcliffe, flown an airplane or achieved many of her storied accomplishments.

As all this shows, Helen Keller has long been reduced to "inspiration porn," a term coined by disability activist Stella Young to describe how disabled people are often objectified to uplift the nondisabled. Keller has been reduced to the cliché of the disabled overachiever, seemingly unimpeded and unbothered by her disabilities. Little of her life is remembered beyond the "miracle" moment in 1886 when her teacher Annie Sullivan got through to her inaccessible six-year-old self. Keller's fascinating and complicated story has become largely hidden from history.

Fortunately, scholar and disability advocate Max Wallace restores Keller's legacy as an empowered, independent thinker and activist in his new biography, *After the Miracle: The Political Crusades of Helen Keller*. The book refreshingly reestablishes Keller's agency. All the ink spilled over the last century about Keller — biographies, historical novels, plays, movies, articles and the like — enables Wallace to circumvent the typical chronological narrative and just stick to his focus: reinscribing Keller's radicalism.

While many credit Keller's socialist awakening to Sullivan's husband John Macy, Wallace provides evidence that she identified as a socialist well before he did, and in fact likely brought him over to the cause. Indeed, Macy is nowhere to be found in Keller's 1912 essay "How I Became a Socialist," written three years after she joined the party; in it, she largely cites reading as opening her mind to the cruelty of capitalism, particularly poverty's connection to disability.

A huge public figure in the early 20th century, Keller was also hugely public about her politics. She staunchly opposed America entering the first world war, publicly supported the Russian revolution, joined the International Workers of the World (IWW) and fiercely supported women's right to vote. "I believe suffrage will lead to socialism," she told *The New York Times*, "and to me socialism is the ideal cause." Wallace smartly notes that Keller made public remarks far worse than many of those arrested, imprisoned and/or deported under the 1918 Sedition Act, yet remained untouched.

Curiously, the ableism Keller endured could also protect her, as many people simply assumed that she had been tricked or manipulated into her beliefs. She caused a stir when in 1916 she sent a check for $100 (about $3,000 today) to the NAACP, accompanied by a passionate letter decrying racism as "a denial of Christ." This was a far cry from her roots growing up in postbellum Alabama as the daughter of a Confederate soldier and granddaughter of slave owners. Keller's letter was published in the NAACP newsletter *The Crisis*, then reprinted in Alabama's *Selma Journal* — alongside a broadside that insisted Keller's impressionable mind must have been "poisoned" by her Northern teachers. Again, Keller's perceived lack of agency provided a dubious security; for, as Wallace argues, she very well could have been lynched for her beliefs.

While previous conventional wisdom about Keller largely restricted her radicalism to the early 20th century, Wallace lays out evidence that she actually shifted even further left after World War I, identifying not just as a socialist, but as a Communist. She praised Lenin and the Russian Revolution in her 1929 memoir Midstream; that same year, she told a reporter that she was "a socialist and a Bolshevik".

Indeed, by World War II, Wallace says there's "absolutely no doubt that Helen had become a Fellow Traveler" with the Communist Party, embracing the party without formally becoming a member. He cites Keller's positions on the war, which closely mirrored the party's: despite being so anti-fascist as to support the Spanish loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, Keller opposed U.S. entry into World War II until Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, at which point she did an abrupt about-face. Her fat FBI file documented her friendships with known and suspected Communists, from John Reed, to Howard Fast, to Dorothy Parker (not to mention that joyful anarchist firecracker Emma Goldman). In 1952 Keller publicly endorsed a Stalinist gathering, the Congress of the Peoples for Peace, cabling, "Am with you in your splendid movement."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MORE THAN INSPIRATION PORN: *Young Helen Keller (left) with her teacher Anne Sullivan (right) who taught her how to communicate despite being deaf and blind.*

But Keller wasn't merely a reflexive party follower. Wallace highlights her keen international perspective. She visited South Africa and decried its system of apartheid over 30 years before the issue became a worldwide concern; while there, she befriended Gandhi's family and praised his campaign against British colonialism. She read and wrote in five different languages (in Braille!), subscribed to numerous international newspapers, and closely followed world events.

What's more, Wallace reinscribes not just Keller's radicalism, but also her spirited personality. He portrays her quick wit; even comedian Harpo Marx, another friend, told a reporter he had trouble keeping up with her dry humor. And while history has written off Keller as a spinster, Wallace explores her little-known affair with fellow socialist Peter Fagan. The two applied for a marriage license and planned to elope; but Fagan stood her up, and broke her heart. Wallace even indulges in the far-fetched speculation that Keller and her longtime teacher Sullivan may have been lovers; though it's doubtful that they were romantically involved, they were certainly family to each other.

Above all, Wallace reminds us, Keller thought for herself. Though she never quite conceived of disability as marking an oppressed class in itself, she was ahead of her time in seeing how it is so often linked to race, gender and class oppression. She saw how capitalism could cause or exacerbate disabilities, ironically a situation which has in many ways worsened with time. Keller was cognizant of the relationship between poverty and disability — and indeed, acutely aware of her privilege. Her legendary can-do attitude came not from being "inspirational," but from a complex understanding of her situation that included the knowledge of just how comparatively lucky she actually was. And she wanted to share the wealth — or, more accurately, redistribute it. Keller died in 1968 at age 87, remaining, in one friend's words, "true to her socialist principles to the end."

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Rev,
I'm as scared and angry about climate change as the next person. But not sure about the tactic of annoyance, stopping traffic entering Burning Man, stopping the U.S. Open. The climate people are not winning friends that way. Then again, have I got a better idea? Not really. I know your schtick — you sing songs while you trespass in banks. But is that working?
I'm just sayin'.

— MAC

Dear Mac,
Well, but consider the importance of interrupting festivals and sporting events. The idea that thousands of people are gathering to look away from the Earth in the fall of 2023 is like masturbating during a car accident. The Earth is in open revolt at this point, from wildfires, to atmospheric rivers, to viruses, to three mile-wide tornadoes. Business as usual or recreation as usual? NO! NOT NOW!

Old attitudes are not an option. The Earth is telling us to aggressively confront our cops and bankers, our oil men and our war-mongers... With common sense, with Peace, with the Earth's new rules. Now is the moment. We can't 'take a break from the cares of the world' because we need the physical condition of this planet to be our partner in living life.

EARTHALUJAH!

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.

BURNING MAN

Continued from Page 17

and slapped their knees. I said to ask the road for consent, if it's not an enthusiastic yes then don't go.

I have no idea if it worked but after a full day of hot sun, the road hardened and cars rolled by easy. It was time. I hugged the few remaining campers. Some cried and said this Burn was the most meaningful in their life. Some thanked me. In the last moments, our eyes locked and a profound love shot between us.

I waited eight hours in the line of cars, trucks and RVs leaving. I drove to Pyramid Lake, meditated under the stars and bathed in the cold waters at sunrise. I drove to Sacramento to catch a JetBlue flight to New York and peering out of the window, I felt the many faces I cared for lost in darkness below.

The 737 touched down at JFK and I stumbled into the terminal and blinked as if landing on an alien planet. Clean travelers drank fresh coffee, ate fresh food and walked linoleum floors. It stunned me. I forgot how much abundance we live in. How much we take for granted.

I bought coffee and sat by a window. I could still see the thousands of Burners struggle in a sea of mud. In front of me, a jet filled with people soared into the sky. I didn't know how to make sense of it. I looked at the coffee without drinking it. I held it for a long, long time.

Theater for the New City

SEPTEMBER'S SHOWS

STREET THEATER Book and Lyrics by CRYSTAL FIELD with MUSIC by JOSEPH VERNON BANKS
Saturday, September 16 @ 2:00 PM: STATEN ISLAND -- Tappen Park at Canal, Bay and Water Streets
Sunday, September 17 @ 2:00 PM: MANHATTAN -- Tompkins Square Park at E. 7th St. & Ave A

FRIDA KAHLO AND THE DANCE WITH DEATH by INFINITY DANCE THEATER DIRECTOR KITTY LUNN
SEPTEMBER 15 - SEPTEMBER 16 FRI and SAT @8PM

TAKEDOWN by CLAUDE SOLNIK
SEPTEMBER 21- OCTOBER 1 THURS to SAT @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

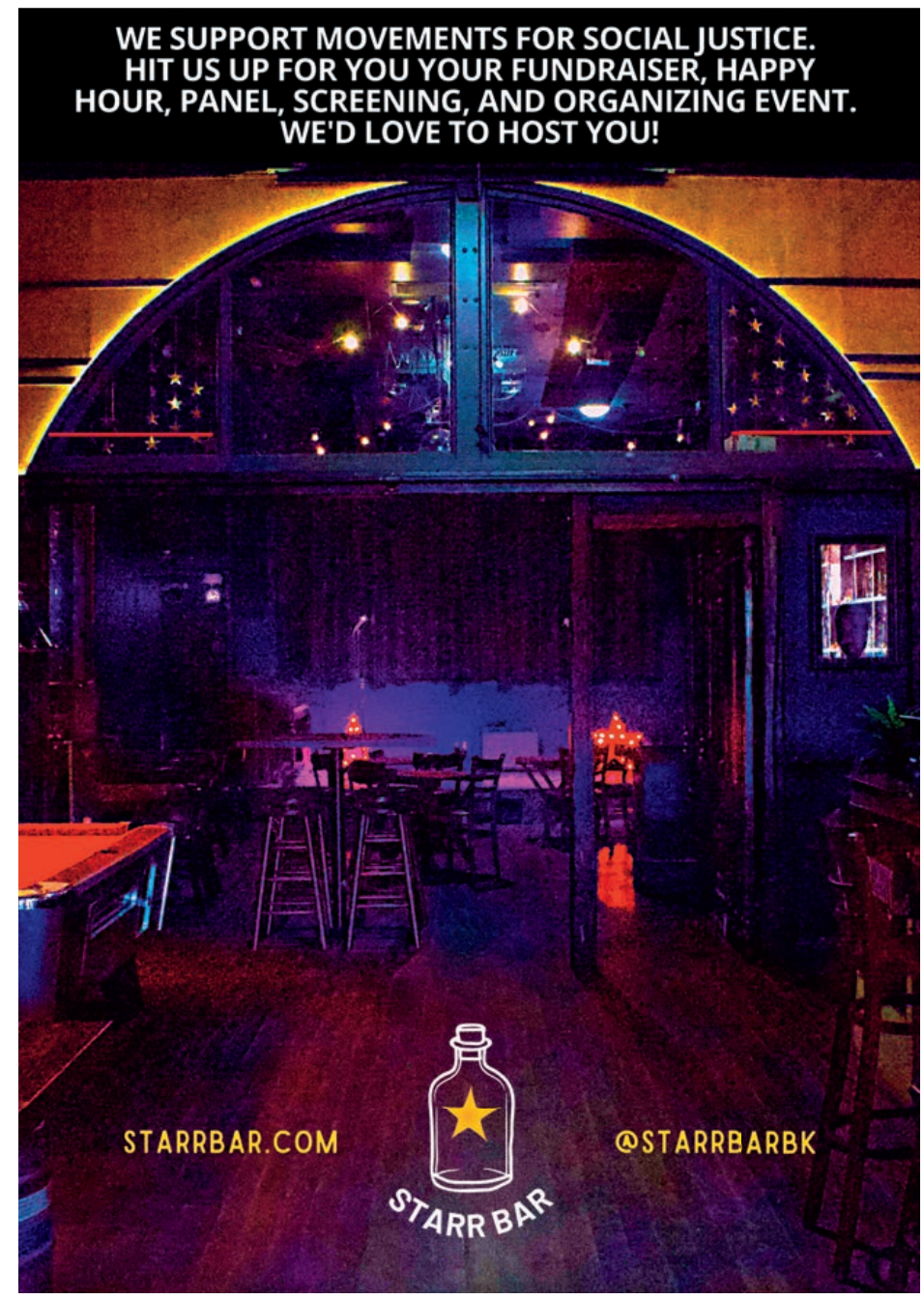
COSMIC ORCHID THEATER COMPANY
SEPTEMBER 21- OCTOBER 8 THURS to SAT @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

TWISTED WRITTEN BY JOEL GREENHOUSE DIRECTED BY JOE BASITA
SEPTEMBER 28TH- OCTOBER 15 THURS to SAT @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

For more info call (212) 254-1109 or visit theaterforthenewcity.net

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

SCAN ME


WE SUPPORT MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.
HIT US UP FOR YOU YOUR FUNDRAISER, HAPPY HOUR, PANEL, SCREENING, AND ORGANIZING EVENT.
WE'D LOVE TO HOST YOU!
STARRBAR.COM
@STARRBARBK
STARR BAR

THIS IS READER-SUPPORTED NEWS

INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE

SEND A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

THE INDYPENDENT
388 ATLANTIC AVE, 2ND FL
BROOKLYN, NY 11217

OR GIVE VIA VENMO!